Once a King, Always a King
Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/56811496.

Rating:
General Audiences

Archive Warning:
No Archive Warnings Apply

Category:
Gen

Fandom:
Sonic the Hedgehog - All Media Types

Relationships:
Original Sonic the Hedgehog Character(s)/Original Sonic the Hedgehog Character(s), Amy Rose & Sonic the Hedgehog

Characters:
Sonic the Hedgehog, Amy Rose (Sonic the Hedgehog), Rouge the Bat, Miles "Tails" Prower, Shadow the Hedgehog, Gawain (Sonic and the Black Knight), Percival (Sonic and the Black Knight), Lancelot (Sonic and the Black Knight), Original Sonic the Hedgehog Character(s)

Additional Tags:
sonic big bang 2024, Post-Canon, Long Lost/Secret Relatives, Culture Shock, Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Sentient Swords, doppelgangers

Language:
English

Collections:
Sonic the Hedgehog Big Bang 2024

Stats:
Published: 2024-06-21 Words: 36,875 Chapters: 18/18

Once a King, Always a King

by Burningstars98

Summary

Sonic was a king once, but that was another lifetime ago... until his beloved knights come in need of aid.

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It has been years since Sonic left behind the realm of Camelot and tried to resettle in his own world, his own time. Here, he is the world's fearless hero, Eggman's arch enemy, and a lover of fresh chilidogs. He takes orders from no one, and no one takes orders from him, though remnants of his time have changed him...

However, Sonic's past adventure returns as three of his best knights arrive in his world. Stranded in an unfamiliar land and their sacred swords missing, Sonic must once more don the persona of King Arthur to assist them in their search for the missing weapons and get them home. With Tails and Shadow at their side, the knights and king set out across the isle of Londoon and beyond, exploring the remnants of a lost kingdom and uncovering secrets long since buried beneath the soil...

Part of the first annual "Sonic Big Bang 2024" that was hosted on Tumblr!

Notes

Hey everyone! This is my contribution to the Sonic Big Bang 2024, hosted on Tumblr alongside hundreds of other talented writers and visual artists!

Look Who the Storm Blew In...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"...Man, it's really coming *down* out there... I *did* clean out the gutters, didn't I, Tails?"

"I dunno Sonic..."
The double-tailed fox briefly looked up from his book, giving his older brother a raised brow. "... *Did you?* "

Sonic the Hedgehog put his chin in his hand, stroking it as though he had a beard to stroke. His eyes squinted as he peered out into the dreary night, occasionally lit up from a distance by flickers of lightning, and he hummed softly. "...Could have sworn I *did* ..."

"You know, I'll bet you could run out there, check the gutters, and be back in before a single drop hit you."

The hedgehog turned from the window, "Okay. I'm *fast* , but not *that fast* , Tails- "

A rumble of thunder quivered the walls of the house, and both Sonic and Tails' ears pricked in alert before settling once more. "Yeesh... Hate to be out in *that* right now."

The fox placed his book down on the side table, standing up from the armchair and stretching his arms and legs. "It *is* getting rather late and we knew it was coming, I'd like to think just about everybody's at home and out of it at this point."

"Hmm... Perhaps, but we shouldn't assume as such."
Sonic turned back to his brother as he snorted, "What?"

"You..."
Tails mimicked the hedgehog's pose, even stroking his own imaginary beard. " *'We shouldn't assume as such...* '" He repeated in a stuffy voice, "Your vocabulary and mannerisms have gotten so... *Unlike you* lately."

Sonic pulled his hands down, tucking them behind his back and looking off to the side. "Oh... you think so?"

"Yeah. It's like you went and spent time in another country and picked

up on their behavior and sentence structures… but that was never the case in all those places we went during the Gaia Crisis… Don't know what would make one place different from the others."

Sonic shrugged, "Couldn't tell you, Tails..."

The reason being that he had a feeling Tails wouldn't believe it. Tails was right, Sonic *hadn't* picked up on the speech and mannerisms of all the places they went during that particular adventure, but Sonic hadn't spent a whole lot of *time* in each of those places either. Perhaps if they'd spent a few *weeks* in each place- Spagonia, Apotos, Chun-Lun- then maybe he'd have picked up on it, but not after only a few short days and nights.

Other than the lands surrounding his own home of Green Hills, there wasn't really any one place he'd spent a lot of time in... Except for *one* .
It was a place of magic, of knights and dragons, of swords and shields, of enchantments and curses... and of *myth* . It was all legend, tales of valor and noble deeds passed from person to person and the details lost, and then bound in a storybook he'd been dragged into. It had happened once before, and then once he had saved that realm from its approaching crisis, he was returned to the land of the living, the real and normal- well, normal for *him* .

There were days he missed that world, a world that for all of its problems and lack of technology, was also devoid of *Eggman* . Oh, how that scientist seemed eager to get under Sonic's quills. Every few months it was something else, and Sonic had managed to succeed thus far in preventing world domination, or even *destruction* from some of the man's plots gone awry. He'd made friends in those events, a network that now covered and watched the entire planet for anything of note.

Actually, come to think of it, Dr. Eggman had been rather quiet the past few weeks... What plot could he be up to now? It had to be *something* , retirement was not on his agenda anytime soon-

Knock! Knock!

The hedgehog's ears pricked once more as the sound came from the front door, firm and solid on the wood, and his eyes followed Tails as the fox approached the door to answer. "See? *Someone's* still out! Probably some door-to-door salesperson trying to meet their quota-"

Tails opened the door, and then paused. "Erm... Sonic?"

"What's up, bud?"

"You uh... You might want to come and *see* this."

Sonic got from the couch and started towards the door, but the closer he got, the more he saw, and the faster his feet moved. He had soon overtaken the fox to stand at the door, eyes wide as he overlooked the trio on the front porch. "Oh... My... Chaos."

An echidna- rare in this world to begin with, and even *rarer* to be seen dressed fully in armor- stood slightly hunched, an armored hedgehog limp and draped over one shoulder and an armored cat leaning against his opposite side with her right leg tucked up and away from dragging on the ground. Mud clung to their armor, and rainwater soaked their garments underneath.

"My liege..." The echidna begged, an effort at a smile appearing but weariness overtaking him as he slouched a bit more. "...We are in dire need of aid."

Sonic opened the door wider and then offered his hand to the cat. "Come inside, *all of you* . Good gracious-"

The cat took his hand, allowing him to guide her into the house and out of the rain. She winced as she hobbled on one foot into the warmth of the building, looking as Sonic peered out into the storm quickly to make sure there wasn't anyone else out of sight needing shelter. "Our deepest gratitudes, my king." She gasped, blinking raindrops out of her face.

"Here, let me get you to the hearth and dried off."
Sonic aided her in limping on one foot over to the fireplace, pulling her helmet from her head and unstrapping her armor.

"Sire, you need not-"

"The last thing I want is for you to catch your death from wet garments, Percival. Allow me just this once."

"...Of course."

Sonic nodded, and then turned back to the echidna as he searched for a place to rest his other downed companion. "Rest him there, Gawain."
Sonic pointed to the couch, and the echidna proceeded to lay the hedgehog down on it. "Remove his armor carefully... Tails."
He looked to his little brother, "Get the medical kit from the kitchen."

"Right!" Tails hurried out of the room with a nod. Sonic was grateful his brother recognized the urgency and wasn't trying to pry for answers- at least, not yet. That could wait until things settled.

Sonic sighed, carefully setting Percival's armor by the warmth of the fire that roared behind them. "What *happened* to you three...? I thought I'd never see you all again, and now you show up wounded at my home."

"It is a long and strange tale, Sir Sonic." Percival whispered, seething as he unstrapped her greaves.

"Is it broken?"

"H-Hard to tell..." She winced, leaning back against the stone of the fireplace's hearth. "...We were traversing the lands outside of the castle town, when the ground seemed to vanish from beneath us. We awoke in the fortress of a figure, broad in stature and leading an army of enchanted armor, and it is our assumption that he was responsible for our arrival here..."

"Our blades sensed an evil in him and fled him." Gawain added, "We managed to escape ourselves, but Percival was wounded, and Lancelot severely weakened in transporting us to safety." His gaze moved down, "We do not know where our blades have gone to, nor where we are now."

"They just abandoned you?"

"N-No! We *told* them to flee and we would join them soon, they just… How did you put it before… *'Got a head start?'* "

Tails returned to the room, handing Sonic the white box and then taking some of the stray armored pieces and wiping them dry with a towel, offering others to the pair still conscious. Sonic opened the box and found the wrappings, examining the cat's foot and lower leg before carefully beginning to wrap it. "This will keep it still until we can find out for certain."

"Thank you, Sire..."

"How did you *find* me? Surely Lancelot didn't just happen to transport you right here."

"Indeed... We arrived in the town square, where the townsfolk were able to direct us here once we heard them mention your name."

"Heh. Good thing you're so *famous* ." Tails teased softly, scrubbing a little at some smudge on Percival's visor.

Percival looked to Tails, "You are Sir Sonic's squire, yes?"

"Erm... Sort of?"

Sonic smiled, "He's my little brother. I've been teaching him things, but he is set on his own path."

"Hmm..." Gawain tilted his head as he too removed his helm, "He resembles the castle town's blacksmith *greatly* ."

"Yes, I know. I know others here in my own realm that resemble the three of you as well, though I'm not quite sure *why* ."

"Are they *also* your allies?"

"Yes, although..." Sonic chuckled a bit, "...I *also* met them first in a duel against them."

Tails smirked, "You make *most* of your friends by fighting them-" Those conscious then jumped as a loud clap of thunder shook the house, flickering the lights but fortunately, not losing power completely. "...Whew. Good thing you all got in here when you did. Not a good idea to be walking around in metal armor during a thunderstorm."

Once Percival's leg was wrapped, Sonic collected blankets and pillows for the two other knights, as well as dry clothes. Sonic had never been one to prefer clothes, but he kept some of them for others to borrow in situations like these. A few oversized t-shirts he'd gotten from concerts and festivals would have to do for tonight, as well as some gloves and socks.

When he returned from the bedroom, he found Tails was looking over Lancelot now. "How's he doing?"

"Hmm... Pulse is slow, but steady... I think he's just exhausted. He'll be fine with some rest."

Sonic nodded, "Good, good..." He handed out the items he'd collected, "There's a closet right over there if you want to change in private. We'll look into getting clothes more suitable for you three tomorrow when the rain lets up."

"We are in your debt, my liege..." Gawain hummed, looking then to Tails. "...Both of you."

"You're welcome." Tails replied, and then gave a yawn. "I'm gonna head to bed, you all can explain... *All of this*- in the morning."

Sonic smirked, "Right, explanations... Goodnight, Tails."

"Goodnight."

The fox left the room and wandered down the hall, leaving the king with his knights alone. They sat in the quiet, the sound of the rain, the occasional roll of thunder, and the soft crackling of the flames dancing in the fireplace. Gawain lifted Lancelot up from his lying position, just enough to get the unconscious knight's wet tunic off and the temporary replacement on before resting him back down.

Sonic scrubbed at his face with a soft groan, "Broad-statured figure with an evil spirit... I think I know *exactly* who did this..."

"Is he a threat, my king?"

"He *can* be..." Sonic pulled his hands down and rested them in his lap, "We'll have to see what he's up to... My biggest question right now is how he summoned you here. He's not usually the magic-casting type... You said your blades ran away, was Caliburn with you?"

"No." Percival assured, "Caliburn left the castle town shortly after your departure. He spoke of returning to his resting place until Camelot needed him once again... We do not know where that place is, but he was not with us when we were brought to this strange realm."

"Hmm... Then once you three are back on your feet, we need to start looking for them. I have a feeling it was your swords the Doc was after." Sonic sighed, "Though it does make me feel better knowing he doesn't have Caliburn hostage..."

"We are sorry if our presence has inconvenienced you."

"No, you're all fine. It's not like I had anything else to do this weekend."
He stood up slowly, "Get some rest. I'll check on you in the morning."

"Rest well, Sir Sonic..." Percival encouraged.

Sonic looked to the echidna crouching by the fire, "Gawain, if Lancelot

wakes up in the night panicked, I am assigning *you* the task of making sure he does not *destroy* everything."

The echidna gave him a humored look, "You have my word, my liege."

“Yeah, about that… Let’s try to keep the honorifics to a minimum. No need to call me *‘your highness’* or anything like that.”

“You do not wish for us to speak of your prestige?”

“It’s not that… *Exactly* .” Sonic bit his lip, “...The people here in my realm don’t know that I am King Arthur, though they are familiar with the title. I’m not a king to them, just a simple knight trying to keep the peace.”

Percival nodded, “You seek not to draw too much attention to the situation.”

“Right.”

“Very well… Sir Sonic, we shall call you.”

“Thanks… Goodnight, I will see you all in the morning.”

Sonic nodded to each of them, and then wandered from the living room and down the hall towards his own bedroom. Another roll of thunder flickered the lights, and the hedgehog plopped backwards onto the quilt, staring up at the ceiling.

"...Oh boy... *This* is gonna be fun..."

Chapter End Notes

> Also, check out this AWESOME ART that my fellow artists made for the fic!
>
> https://www.tumblr.com/pretzlforpresident/753912814147715072
> https://www.tumblr.com/ectalexi/753912703113920512
> https://www.tumblr.com/sensorii-scribbles/753909339958444032

The Following Morning

Dawn came all too early, but with it came clearer skies- blue streaks breaking through the gray overhead, promising the passing on of the night's rain to a clean, clear morning.

Sonic sat up and yawned, blinking away the slumber and then shaking his head to realign any stray quills. "Morning, world..." He mumbled, swinging his legs over the side of the bed.

The scent of wood smoke caught his attention; it was stronger than before, and had a slightly different scent than the wood from the night before. He groaned, removing himself from the bed and wandering his way to the door. "I swear, if Gawain used the table legs for kindling-"

He walked out into the living room, and saw to his relief that while Gawain *was* in fact putting fresh wood in the fireplace, Tails was there to supervise. "Ah... Good morning..."

"Good morning, Sir Sonic." Percival sat up a little more straight in the armchair, where she must've chosen to sleep the night before. "Did you rest well?"

"Ugh... I slept like a *rock* ..." Sonic rubbed his eyes with another yawn, "...Hey, Tails."

"Hey... Don't worry, Gawain and I found wood outside that was still dry for this."

"Right... I wouldn't expect *you* to be using the table."

"Surely you know I would have asked for *permission* before disassembling your furniture for fuel, my king!" Gawain defended, though his eyes twinkled with a teasing light.

"Perish the thought I would assume you wouldn't, Gawain." Sonic smirked.

"There's pancakes ready on the counter and I've got the griddle going." Tails explained, "Come and eat."

Sonic helped Percival up to her feet and handed her off to Gawain as he heard Lancelot beginning to stir on the couch, "Go ahead. I'll check on Lancelot first."

"My king, it wouldn't be right for us to eat before you-"

"Ep ep ep." Sonic pointed with a smile, "What I say goes. And remember the discussion on limited titles?"

"My apologies, Sir Sonic...Very well..."

Sonic watched the pair, and then moved closer to the couch as he saw Lancelot's eyelids twitching. He was starting to come out of it, and Sonic knew from experience with Shadow, that he most likely would not wake up *slowly* when he *did* come to. Somebody had to be here to keep him from flying off of the couch.

And just like he'd predicted, the knight's eyes flew open, the red of his irises almost glowing as he sucked in a breath and then sat up. "What-When-Where-"

Sonic put a hand to his shoulder, "Good morning, Lance."

The knight whipped around, his eyes falling on the blue hedgehog and widening. "...Arthur? My king-"

"Easy, easy, it's okay." Sonic bent down as Lancelot tried to scramble from the couch to bow, "You're all safe now. You're in my home."

"My king..." Lancelot put a hand to his head, and then looked back to the hedgehog, "I am delighted to see you, but regret having disturbed you with our arrival-"

"Hey."
Sonic put a hand on the knight's shoulder, "There is nothing to apologize for. You three were brought here against your will and I am happy to act as your host until we can get you back to Camelot."

Lancelot finally lifted his head completely, "Many thanks, my king."

“Not a problem, and please, just call me Sir Sonic for now. Like I told the others last night, the less attention drawn to the situation, the easier things will be.”

“I… Yes, of course.”

Sonic helped him back to his feet, "Come on, we saved you some breakfast."

Lancelot examined the shirt he was presently wearing, along with the ones Percival and Gawain did. "Is this... *Typical* garb of your home?"

"Erm... No. But your tunics were all soaking wet and it was all I had in the spur of the moment last night. I plan on getting you clothes more to your liking later today."

"Arthur, I cannot allow you to spend-"

"Hush."
Sonic led him into the kitchen, gesturing to a chair beside Gawain to rest before grabbing him a plate with pancakes. "For now, I am not your king, but your host, so please... Let me host."

"...Very well."

Sonic's smile widened a bit and then he leaned back against the counter, watching the three knights eat.

"Now," Tails murmured beside him, taking a sip of his morning coffee. "You said I'd get some context this morning?"

"Right, right... So you remember that time I disappeared for a bit and then when I came back, my accent was a little off and I was acting like I hadn't seen you in ages?"

"Right..."

"So what happened was that the royal wizard of Camelot had used her magic to summon me there to stop a crisis. Of course, we found out that she had a *bigger* crisis in mind once I'd given her what she wanted and then I had to stop *her too,* but... Anyway, I met these three during that time, and after it was all over, I stayed there for a little bit to try and help them... *Stabilize things.* "

"Indeed..." Percival hummed, "The fall of Camelot was inevitable, but your brother took it upon himself to try to ensure its decline was not one to bring mass losses of life."

Tails' eyes were wide, "So *that's* where you picked up on the formal speech...!"

The hedgehog dipped his head, his cheeks burning just a bit. "Yeah, that's where I picked up on it."
Sonic took one of the pancakes from a plate on the counter, "So, once we're done here, we'll head into town to find you some clothes, and then we'll get started looking for your blades."

“And their swords just… Fled on their own?”

“Indeed.” Gawain explained, “Each blade is enchanted with a life of its own, though for a time they remained in slumber, following the False Arthur’s rise to power. Arondight, Galatine, and Lavatein all remained inanimate and silent until Exclaibur was revived, reawakening them once more.”

Sonic smirked, “Heh, yeah… The looks on your faces when they came to life after we stopped Merlina is forever etched into my brain. Foul-mouthed Arondight.”

Lancelot smiled just a hint, “Indeed. I have been making efforts to quell that in him.”

Tails rubbed his chin, "So where do we start? I mean, where would a sentient, magical sword go to hide?"

"Hmm... Good question, Tails... I'd think they'd go somewhere *familiar* to them, but I have no idea where that might be."

"Hmm... Let me see which region has the most ties to the Camelot legends..."
He pulled out his Tails Electric, tapping at the screen quietly before looking up as he felt the knights staring. "Oh, um... Did you want to look *too* ?"

"What sorcery is this?" Lancelot walked over, touching the screen with wide eyes as it moved with his touch. "...An enchanted scroll?"

"Erm... Sure?" Tails shrugged with a smile, "...Oh hey, watch this." He held the tablet closer to him, "Computer, find origins of the legends of Camelot."

The screen flashed and then changed text to a list of sites, and Lancelot's enamor grew.

"Incredible... You speak and it *responds* !"

"Cool, huh?" Sonic came around to Tails' other side, "What do we have, Bro?"

"Well, it looks like most of the results say that the biggest ties to Camelot and its stories is the Isle of Londoon, just off of Spagonia's coast."

"Then we're off to the foggy Isle of Londoon!"

"Hold on. How do you plan on all of us *getting* there? Normally, we could take the Tornado, but with Percival and Lancelot *hurt* -"

"I am in condition to travel." Lancelot defended, "I will not let anything slow me down."

"Easy, Lance... Nobody's doubting your eagerness or dedication... How about *you* , Percival?"

The cat looked at her foot as she swung it back and forth a bit, "Still sore, but I do not believe it to be broken, thank heavens."

"Good... Tails is right, though. We need to find a way to get you three there, but first we gotta get you all some disguises. We're not gonna get anywhere if people see you all in your armor, too many questions will be asked."

"You are... Ashamed to be *seen* with us?" Percival asked.

"Oh no no no!" Sonic shook his head, "It's just... Well, my allies I mentioned that *look* like you? They're all relatively... *prominent* figures, and it will make the townsfolk anxious and frightened if they see what they think is me and all three of them walking around on a mission."
He rubbed his chin, "We just gotta disguise you enough that they won't immediately assume you're Shadow, Knuckles and Blaze... We need someone who knows *fashion* better than I do!"

He left the table, heading for the phone and then dialing a number that came up on the caller ID much more than anyone else.

"And that which you are holding?" Percival asked.

"A magic box that lets me talk to someone with another magic box far away."

"Fascinating...!"

...Rose Residence, this is Amy Rose speaking.

"Amy! Hey, I know it's early and all, but... I need a favor. Can you meet Tails and I at the corner of Seventh and Flicky...?"

Disguises First, Plan Later-

Despite being the hometown of the world's greatest hero, Green Hills had remained relatively quiet. Sure, it was threatened by Eggman's plots quite often, but for the townsfolk, it had almost become just another thing to mark off on the calendar. Anytime Eggman's airship or his robot forces were spotted nearby, the alarm would sound and all civilians would retreat to the designated bunkers scattered across town to finish that puzzle they left down there from last time. What had started as frightened screams and panic was now groaning and moans whenever the sun got blotted out by an airship or giant robot.

With all of his world-travels and adventures, Sonic found it nice to come home for a bit between. Here, he wasn't bombarded with requests for photos or autographs, and could walk about freely.

It was still pretty early, so the streets were mostly bare of other townsfolk. A few wandered the streets, but merely waved to the group standing at the corner or ignored them completely.

"So then, who is this maiden for which we are waiting?" Percival asked, leaning on the walking stick Tails had found for her.

Sonic smiled, "Her name's Amy Rose. She's a close friend of mine and resembles Nimue, the Lady of the Lake- That being said, please refrain from bowing to her."

Gawain stepped forward, peering out onto the street to help watch for her. "Does she possess magic that will aid us in our quest?"

"Erm... Yes? Ugh, I'm gonna be honest with you three, clothes are not really my thing."

"Your lack of it even in Camelot spoke of that."

"Right, so... I thought having a feminine eye for this might come in handy."

Tails popped up from behind them, pointing across the street. "Here she comes."

Sonic looked ahead and gave a smile and a wave as he saw Amy making her way towards the crosswalk. Minding the puddles, she practically danced her way across the street to them. "Good morning,

everyone!" Her smile faded just a bit as she overlooked the three knights, "Erm... Might I ask what all of *this* is about, Sonic?"

"Hey, Amy... So, this is Lancelot, Gawain, and Percival of Camelot-"

"Miss Rose..." Lancelot led the trio in a bow, even giving a somewhat rebellious look to Sonic as the hedgehog cringed.

"Y-Yeah. They sure *look* like them, huh? So I need your help getting them some disguises."

Amy blinked, "Camelot? Like... King Arthur's knights, Camelot?"

Sonic had a feeling this was going to be a common question until this was resolved. "...Yeah."

"...So that time you told me that you went missing because you got sucked into a book, but refused to elaborate beyond that-"

"Yeah..."

Amy put her hands on her hips, "Sonic, I almost gave you a *concussion* over that!"

" *I know* ..."

"Why do you speak with guilt when what you said was *true* ?" Gawain asked.

The two hedgehogs shook their heads, "Don't worry about it, Gawain." Sonic assured before clearing his throat. "Anyways, the disguises? We just need to keep them from drawing too much attention until we can get them back."

Amy huffed, "Well, I'm glad you recognized your lack of fashionable knowledge and decided to come to me for help. We'll have these three looking like they own this town in no time! *But*- "
She pointed a finger to his chest, "We're using *your funds,* Mister. Time to put those savings to better use than just weekly chili dog runs."

"Yeah, yeah. Whatever. I'm not that big of a *spender* , you know?"

"Tell me about it." Tails murmured with a playful glare, "I pay all the bills around here..."

" *Anyway!* ... Disguises?"

Amy put her hands to her hips with a confident grin, "Hmph! Follow me, everyone!"

As the pink hedgehog led the group from the corner and onward down the sidewalk, Percival leaned a little closer to Sonic. "Your lady friend seems delightful, Sir Sonic..."

"Hmm? Oh." Sonic cleared his throat as he gave a quick glance to Amy, "She uh... She's not my lady friend. I mean, she's my friend and is a lady, but-"

"I see... You must have *many* such friends."

Sonic chuckled, "Well, maybe just a few... Amy and I met when we were little. She was kinda obsessed with me for a long time, but she's better about it now."

"But she still carries affection for you," Gawain informed, "...And you for *her* ?"

"Okay, when did this become an interrogation on my social life?"

"Indeed." Lancelot grunted, "Do not pester the king with gossip."

"Okay-" Amy interrupted the conversation going on behind her as she stopped in front of a shop and framed the trio between her fingers. "Here's what I'm thinking. We want people to think they *look* like Shadow, Knux, and Blaze, but not to think they *are* them. Gawain's gonna be harder, being an echidna, but I can make it work."

"What is wrong with what I am?" Gawain asked curiously.

"Nothing's wrong, Gawain." Tails assured, "It's just that… Well, we don't have a lot of echidnas that live around here, so it's harder for you to blend into a crowd."

"Ah, yes." Gawain quickly regained his confident stance, "Many thanks, Miles, brother of the king."

Amy giggled as Tails blushed from the title, "Okay, so I figured we'd start this trip with some thrifting, seeing as the 'hog with the money pouch is being *frugal* ..."

Sonic gave her a slight glare as he crossed his arms, "Whatever... Come on."

"Such colorful garments...!"

The knights were in awe of what lay before them, on shelves and hanging racks, as they entered the shop. Separated by type and then coordinated by color, each section was its own rainbow to see, and that wasn't even mentioning some of the patterns that adorned them.

"Such a collection sold by one vendor alone would be unheard of in Camelot..." Percival murmured, running her fingers over a plaid skirt hanging from one of the racks.

Amy grinned, "You boys check out that side of the shop, we girls will have our *own* little fashion show over here."

Sonic shrugged, guiding Lancelot and Gawain away from the door and towards the men's section. "Here's hoping Percival still looks like herself when Amy's done-"

"I *heard that!* "

Sonic ducked for cover behind a rack, despite nothing being thrown his way... *Yet* .

Tails rolled his eyes and then began to overlook the clothes, "I think we should try to find pieces that could work like a medieval cosplay. Tunics, boots, belts. Nothing too flashy or attention-grabbing."

"Flashy as this... *Item* ?" Lancelot held out a midriff top, bright pink and striped with pieces of silvery material. "I am not certain what this is intended to cover, or how it would aid in battle."

"It's meant to be *seen* , not function." Sonic remarked as the dark hedgehog returned it to the rack. "Not surprised someone donated it, yeesh."

"Donated?'

"Yeah!" Tails gestured to the racks, "Almost everything here on these racks were bought brand-new and then donated here when the original owner didn't want it anymore."

"But... It appears to all still be in acceptable condition." Gawain pulled out another top, examining it carefully. "No holes or stains... Why rid of it? Even if it were outgrown, you could save it for your children someday."

Sonic shrugged, "I don't understand it either. I keep my shoes and gloves until they're torn to shreds, but some people's tastes change quickly and they want something different, I guess."

"You're obviously not one of those people." Tails teased, "You've been buying up in size on the same shoes and gloves since we were *kids* ."

"Hey," Sonic tapped the toe of his shoe on the floor and tugged on his glove gently with a smile. "Can't mess with the classic look! Anyways, back to you two..."

The two hedgehogs, fox, and echidna all searched through the racks and shelves of clothing, occasionally commenting on a particularly odd article of clothing or looking out over the racks for Amy and Percival. The girls seemed to be doing the same, though they could hear a lot more gentle arguments between the two over how Percival wanted to look.

"I'm one of the king's knights, not one of the ladies of court. How could I fight in that?"

"But you'd look *gorgeous* in it!"

"I am sorry, Lady Rose, but I simply cannot imagine myself being *comfortable* in it."

"Well... Okay, we'll keep looking."

Sonic grinned a bit, trying not to eavesdrop too much, but it was hard not to.

Tails was a lot more focused on the task, and within a few minutes, he had found several pairs of trousers, belts, and tops to serve as outfits for Lancelot and Gawain.

"Here." He handed them to the knights, "There are closets over there for trying them on in privacy."

The pair nodded, going to the doors and being able to enter right away with the limited number of customers in the store this time of day.

"Enjoying this little adventure, Tails?" Sonic asked softly.

"Sonic, these are some of history's most famous and renowned knights, and they're treating me with respect like I matter! Of course I'm *loving*

this little adventure!"

Sonic's smile faded, "Well *of course* you matter, Tails. Why wouldn't you think so?"

"I mean..." Tails rubbed his arm, "Lancelot and Gawain and Percival... I'm not just your squire and some little, helpless sidekick to you. That's how I feel whenever someone *here* sees me... Just a side of fries to your Chilidog of Greatness-"

Sonic's laughter echoed off of the walls even as it was stifled by his hands slapping over his mouth. "I-I'm sorry, Buddy. I know this is a serious conversation, but I have to save that one for later... But really, Tails."
He put a hand on the fox's shoulder, "You are not my sidekick, you are my *brother* , and if something were to happen to me, you'd be the first person I'd trust to keep everyone safe."

"That's a lot of confidence you have in me, Sonic."

"Confidence is my middle name... Well, actually it's Maurice, but you already know that and that's not the point-"

The sounds of the doors opening caught their attention, and they looked up to see Gawain and Lancelot stepping out of the dressing rooms in their outfits. "Well, Sir Sonic?" Lancelot asked, "Do these disguises suit your preferences?"

Sonic couldn't help but smile, "Those are *perfect* , my knights!"

The outfits themselves were simple enough- Gawain's being a pair of brown boots and gloves, and lighter brown trousers and vest, over a cream-colored, long-sleeved shirt.

Lancelot's consisted of a pair of hiking boots, a pair of faded jeans, and a cream colored shirt covered by a medium gray pull-over hoodie.

"Although..." Tails rubbed his chin, "The jeans and jacket were not part of what you went in with."

Lancelot shrugged casually, "These garments rested in the dressing chamber when I entered. Are *all* dressing chambers left so... *unkempt* ?"

"Not supposed to be..." Sonic hummed, looking to the cashier, who overheard the comment and was already on her way to clean it up

with a hard sigh and an eyeroll. "People have no manners sometimes... But these will certainly do."

"We're done too!"
They turned as Amy stepped up, Percival following behind.
"Introducing... Percival!"

Percival squirmed a bit at the attention, but tried to stand tall before her king. "This will do as well?"

Her outfit resembled Blaze's own outfit to an extent- An indigo tunic adorned with a gold-buckled belt and collar, gray leggings underneath, and matching boots to the tunic, with much chunkier heels than Blaze's regal heels. Her hair had also been pulled back into a tight bun, rather than the spiked ponytail it usually was.

"Yes, Percival. These will all work just fine. Now, let's get this paid for and then we can get started on Phase 2 of Operation Homebound."

The knights nodded, "Let us hope that our attacker has not recaptured our blades..." Gawain hummed, "...Or anyone *else* , for that matter."

"So what *is* Phase 2?" Amy asked.

"We need to get all of us to Londoon. Since that's the place most associated with Camelot in the tales, we have a feeling that's where their swords ran away to."

"Ran away?"

"Eeeeeyeah. Their swords are enchanted, able to think for themselves- sort of- and they ran away from Eggman when he brought them here."

"Hmm. Smart swords."

"The problem is that the *Tornado* won't hold that many people, unless some of them hold onto the side, and that's a long way to go like that." Tails remarked.

"How *long* would it take to *sail* ?" Gawain asked.

" *Weeks,* Gawain. We don't have that kind of time." Sonic muttered, "Besides, even if we *weren't* in a hurry, you ain't getting *me* on a boat for that long..."

“Ah yes, I had quite forgotten your… Hesitance to the sea.”

Amy hummed in thought, "...Maybe you could ask Rouge to lend you a GUN transport? Tell her it's for Eggman-Busting business, not pleasure."

"And have Lance and Shadow run into each other?" Sonic shook his head and waved his hands, " *Bad idea* ."

"We might have to take that chance, Sonic." Tails reminded, "We won't be able to get them on a commercial flight without ID- even *with* your *roguish charm* - and like you said, sailing there's not an option."

The hedgehog groaned, his head tilting up towards the ceiling and his eyes closing tightly. "Oh...! Okay, okay. We'll ask Rouge, but we'd better hope Shadow's in a decent mood...!"

The Angry Mirror

The disguises worked, thank Chaos. Some looks were given, a few stares held longer than normal, but no questions were asked and not much attention was drawn.

The train ride to the city took almost an hour, and Tails spent much of it answering the knights' questions. This serpent of metal, with doors that opened without touching them, windows clear enough to see through perfectly, and once it got going, they marveled at how fast the landscape flew past them.

Tails wanted to go into everything about the train in full detail, but he had to restrain himself- The knights weren't familiar with modern technology, or even the *old* technology that came to be when locomotives first were invented. In comparison to Camelot, they were hundreds and hundreds of years out of their depth and familiarity, yet seemed to be taking it all quite well.

Sonic could have crossed the distance in minutes, but sometimes he too enjoyed the chance to just ride the whole way.

"So if not by boat, how do we intend to reach the isle?" Percival asked as she turned back from the window.

"The transport we're hoping we can use would *fly* us there." Tails replied, "It's a machine, like this train, but able to glide on the currents of wind. In it, we could cross the sea between us before the sun sets."

"Well, before it sets *here* ." Sonic mumbled, "Londoon's six hours ahead, after all."

"How can one part of the world be later in the day than another?"

"It's just... You know how the sun goes down in the west? Well, if you head east, then the sun kinda... Sets *faster* ?"

"Hmm... I do not understand, but I will trust you, Arthur."

"Sure..." Sonic slumped in his seat, resting his head against the back and closing his eyes with a sigh. *You guys would trust me right off a cliff if I asked you to...*

Over the low rumble of the train, he heard movement, and then felt Tails' gloved hand touch his shoulder. "Hey... You *okay* ?"

"Yeah... I'm just out of practice being... In charge." He opened one eye, "I like to be like the wind, you know? Nobody is in charge of me, and I am in charge of no one."

Tails smiled, "It's stressful having everyone coming to you for the answers and instruction, hmm?"

Sonic nodded, closing his eyes again. "Just hope we can get them home soon... I at least had knowledge of the old ways when I went to Camelot, they have *no idea* what this futuristic world has..."

"We'll get them home, Sonic. No matter what, we always succeed, right?"

Sonic smiled, "Right..."

Empire City Station in fifteen minutes.

"Wake me if I fall asleep between now and then."

"Mmm-hmm... Sure, Sonic."

"You are *anxious* , Arthur..."

Indeed, the hedgehog had seemed uneasy ever since the decision was made to speak to this... *Shadow* . Lancelot had heard his king speak of this ally before- even during his and Arthur's first encounter in the woods. During his time in Camelot, Arthur's speaking of him had often brought multiple glimmers to the king's eyes; glimmers of humor like remembrances of good times, glimmers of sadness like remembrances of poor times, and a glimmer Lancelot could not quite place... But for the moment, he seemed resistant to the idea of seeing his ally again.

"There is animosity between the two of you?" Gawain asked, "You do not wish to see him."

Sonic led the way through the buildings, approaching a place that appeared to be a mighty fortress. Thick, stone walls surrounded watchtowers and structures, and soldiers sprawled across the tops of the walls, watching them warily with weapons at the ready to defend if necessary.

"Shadow and I's relationship has always been... Turbulent." Sonic hummed, "While not enemies, our interactions are rarely, if *ever* ,

light-hearted. Mostly business, and only when the situation is dire."

"So your presence heralds trouble for him."

"Right..."

They'd contacted their informant before departing, of course. Miles had used his enchanted tablet to send a message to someone called Rouge, who their king had informed was a companion of Shadow and who could speak to their superiors about borrowing the transport.

To be honest, Lancelot was concerned it would not be borrowing at all. Borrowing implied *returning* the item, and his history with the king was not one of borrowed items remaining in usable condition. They *did try* to keep that wagon in one piece...

It was Rouge they would initially be meeting at the front of the base, and hopefully they could get their transport and then get out of there before Shadow ever knew Sonic had stepped onto the grounds.

"There you are, Big Blue!"

They looked ahead, seeing a bat with fur the color of freshly-fallen snow land before them. Her figure- combined with the garments she wore- would've made even the most scandalous lady of Camelot blush, but Lancelot was a knight of honor and dignity, and thus kept his eyes on her face.

Sonic cleared his throat, "Hey, Rouge... So, like I said over the chat, we need transport."

"I've already spoken to the head honcho of the base, and he's discussing it as we speak. Hopefully we get a *'yes'* soon." She overlooked the three knights, "Wow... You weren't kidding."

"Nope."
Sonic crossed his arms, "We need to get to Londoon as quickly as we can. The longer they're here, the more danger they're in."

"Have no fear, my king." Percival gave a bow, and Lancelot found relief that his fellow knight was walking on her injured foot quite well. "We will do everything in our power to protect you and your people."

Rouge smirked, "Their king?"

Percival's ears folded back in shame as she realized she'd slipped up. "M-My apologies-"

Sonic placed a hand on her shoulder with a comforting smile; nothing was held against his fellow knight. "It's a long story...Basically-"

Lancelot didn't hear the next part of the hedgehog's words, because something, or rather *someone* , slammed into him from behind. Instinct took over as he rolled, flipping his attacker over and slamming them into the asphalt. The knight put some distance between them, reaching for his blade but only finding empty space... Right. *Arondight* was still missing. He felt so incomplete without it.

As the attacker got up, it was like looking in a mirror- a very, very *angry* mirror. The same eyes that burned red, the same dark quills split by strands of crimson. The mirror was preparing for another strike, but then there was a flash of blue and a gust of wind, and the next moment, both Sonic and the other were tumbling across the ground.

"Sonic!" Gawain moved forward, but Tails caught his wrist. "We must-"

"No, don't get involved." Tails warned, "That'll only make things worse! Sonic's used to this, let him handle it."

Sonic and Shadow rolled for a few more moments, taking turns on who was on their back, until the speedster was able to knock Shadow off of him and put some distance. "You just can't make anything *simple* , can you?" Sonic hissed, "We don't want trouble."

"You should have thought of that before you brought an inferior *copy* of me here!"

" *Inferior* !?" Lancelot responded in disgust.

Fortunately, Sonic was quick to defend him. "He's no copy. He's one of the best swordsmen and warriors I know, who just happens to *look* like you! If anything, you're a copy of *him* !"

"How dare you-!"

" *Enough* !"
All eyes turned to Percival, who bowed her head in respect. "Forgive me for the outburst, Sir Sonic, but we are wasting time. The longer we delay our quest, the more danger our blades could be in."

Sonic stood up straight once more, dusting himself off. "You're right,

Percival... We only came to borrow a transport so we can reach Londoon. That's all."

"Why not use the kid's plane?" Rouge asked.

"You know the Tornado's only a two-seater, and *these three* -" Sonic gestured to the knights, "-Aren't used to flight via hanging onto the wing. Much less for hours at a time. Commercial's out because they're from Camelot and don't have updated ID."

"They forgot to pack their IDs before they went out larping?"

"They're not larping." Tails affirmed, "These three are the legitimate knights of Camelot. Sir Lancelot, Sir Gawain, and Sir Percival."

The trio gave bows, and then turned back to their king. "We were brought here against our wills by some magician referred to as... Eggman, was it?" Percival asked.

"Right. Magician's not quite the right term, though…Whatever." Sonic crossed his arms, "Our guess is he was after their swords, which are enchanted, but they're also sort of sentient and ran away. So we need to get to Londoon to look for them, because that's where we think they would have gone to hide."

Shadow grumbled, "You can't seem to make anything simple *either* , Faker... Every time this sort of thing happens, it's a whole thing that the rest of us get dragged into."

"Look, I didn't *want* to pull you guys into this, but we don't really have much choice. If I could have kept you and Lance *far away* from each other, I would have."

"So, will you grant us access to your flying machine, or no?" Gawain grunted, "Though I believe a request from a *king* would be enough."

Lancelot gave his fellow knight a brief glare, "He asked us not to pass his title around, Gawain."

Sonic lifted a hand before Shadow could ask, "Like you said, it's a whole thing... So?"

Shadow grumbled again, and then turned away. "I will talk to them about getting one of the transports granted, but if so-" He sent a death glare to his rival, "I'm coming with you, to make sure you don't mess this up."

"No, you don't have to-" Sonic groaned as Shadow dashed away towards the buildings. "Great. Just what I was trying to *avoid* ...!"

Lancelot hummed softly, "...He seems like a *troubled* soul..."

"He is." Rouge sighed, "... but he's also very proud and stubborn..."

"Hmm." Gawain looked to his fellow knight, "Reminds me of another warrior I know... Is your other ally, the one whom I resemble, as at odds with you as Shadow?"

"Erm... Not really. Knux mostly just doesn't like me showing up unannounced, but he doesn't try to pummel me the second I show up… *Usually* ."

Lancelot tugged the sleeves of his shirt down, running his fingers over the material. Soft and warm it may be in the chilly air, but he was beginning to miss his armor.

Rouge crossed her arms, "So now the band consists of three lost knights, a king, his little brother, and the Ultimate Lifeform..."

"You're not going to come with, Rouge?" Tails asked.

Rouge shook her head, "I gotta keep here and make sure Omega doesn't blow the place to high heaven. He's been particularly trigger-happy these past few days, it's been too quiet around here. But, I'll check in on you guys periodically."
She walked over to Lancelot, brushing him off with a hand. "You good? Shadow didn't knock anything out of place with that tackle?"

Lancelot cleared his throat, "N-Not at all... Though I appreciate your concern, Lady Rouge."

"Lady..." She gave Sonic a smile, "I like this guy already. You wouldn't hear Red calling me that."

"Knuckles knows you have a reputation, Rouge." Tails remarked with a grin, "You two have a history."

"Fair enough."

Rouge.
Shadow's voice came through a band on her wrist. **Tell them the transport is heading out from the West Gate in ten minutes.**

"Sounds good." Rouge gave them a smile and tilted her head, "Well,

looks like your ride's here..."

"You... Are certain this box of metal will *fly* ?"

Sonic beamed as his knights once again marveled over modern technology, watching Gawain feel the side of the transport with a hand. "Yup. The exact science behind it is outside my own expertise, but maybe Tails can explain it later."

"It is not that we do not believe you," Gawain hummed, "But the train we rode to this city at least had wheels to roll its way to our destination. *This* ... The wings do not move, how will it ride into the air like a bird or dragon?"

Tails patted the knight's shoulder, "I'll explain it to you later, like Sonic said. Just trust us for now-"

"We're wasting time."
Shadow brushed past them and opened the door to the transport, "Either we go, or you get out of my quills."

Sonic gave a sigh, and then hopped up into the transport and offered his hand to Percival. "Ladies first."

"Thank you, Sir Sonic..."

The rest of the group climbed aboard, sitting down along the edges of the transport and Sonic assisting the knights with latching the safety harnesses in.

"Feel like a coaster operator at Eggmanland..." He mumbled softly as he sat down on his own, a giggle coming from Tails beside him. "Alright, here we go. This ride will be quite a bit longer than the last, so feel free to settle down and rest for now..." He raised a brow, "...And Shadow, stop glaring at Lancelot. He's literally just sitting there."

Shadow gave an irritated grunt.

The transport's engines began to whir louder and the cabin began to vibrate around them. The knights gripped the harnesses, but seemed comforted seeing how calm Sonic was. If their king wasn't worried, then they mustn't be.

Londoon

The flight went by quickly, with most of the passengers being asleep for much of it. It had already been a long day, and it had hardly been noon when they'd left. Sonic was one of those to doze off, but as the rhythmic droning sound and the vibrations of the transport died down, he lifted his head from where it rested against the wall, looking around as others did the same.

"Did you rest well?" Percival asked.

Sonic unstrapped himself from the harness and stretched as he stood up, "Mmm... Yeah, nothing but a good catnap to pass the time... No offense, Percival."

The knight grinned, "Think nothing of it."

"Hmph." Shadow got up, "Let's go. The sooner we get this done, the sooner I can go back to work."

"Oh come on, Shadow. Don't tell me you prefer being on stand-by and watching war movies with Omega for days on end over actually getting out in the field for a day or two."

"If it were with my team, then maybe. But not *you* ..."

Sonic crossed his arms with a pout, but was comforted by Tails putting a hand to his shoulder. Shadow went to the door and opened it, exposing the open air of a mostly-empty airfield and the beginning colors of sunset. "Gotta love time-difference..."

"It was even more fun with Chip. Just going day, night, day, night."

"Painful too. Those transformations were no picnic... Speaking of picnics!" He hopped out of the transport and looked to the others, "Let's find something to eat real quick. I'm starved! Shadow, you can start asking around in the meantime, since you apparently *don't eat* ..."

" *Look, Faker.* Just because your little minions here will do whatever you say without question, doesn't mean you're the boss of me!"

"You're the one who insisted on coming with me, remember?"

Shadow huffed, his nose inches from Sonic's. The blue hedgehog didn't budge, arms crossed and glaring right back. He wasn't going to back

down, not in front of his knights...

The ultimate lifeform finally backed off with another huff, walking away. "I'll do some recon. You all stay out of trouble."

He took off into the city, and Sonic finally relaxed his shoulders. "I wish he didn't have to be like that..."

"Do not let it worry you, Arthur." Lancelot murmured, "I agree that we should find something to eat before we properly begin our quest."

"R-Right! Sorry..." Sonic took in a deep breath, and then paused. "...Wow."

"What is it?" Tails asked.

Sonic exhaled and then smiled. "...The *air* ... It smells..." He looked at the knights, his smile widening. "...I think we're in the right place. Come on, the shops will be closing down soon. Let's find some food."

Tails nodded, looking at his Miles Electric. "Gimme a second to see what's nearby..."

Tails hadn't been kidding when he'd said that the Isle had deep ties to Camelot. The architecture was telling enough.

Tall skyscrapers rose up from the streets, but seemed to have been distinctly positioned like towers and turrets of a castle fortress. Evenly spaced and similar in appearance, a few stood at the city's edges on all sides, slightly taller deeper within, and in the center was the tallest, a spire of metal and glass that rose into the clouds and disappeared from view. Scattered through them were streets of cobblestone and districts that each carried enough that anyone could walk to their destination. Homes were placed between and over shops.

They certainly kept the *'castle town'* vibe. Several street corners held statues of metal or even stone, of knights or village children playing games. Store signs kept the medieval designs at least somewhere in their logos, and banners of color hung from light poles, blowing in the breeze as inhabitants and tourists wandered the streets.

"This place... Ah." Percival spun around, "Almost feels like Camelot. In spirit."

"I agree." Gawain hummed, "It is oddly comforting..."

Tails smiled as he examined the map on his tablet, "It even has one of the districts labeled as the Castle District."

"Heh, probably where the city officials live..." Sonic hummed. He then looked up ahead, "Hey, check it out!"

The group followed his gaze to just beyond the next block, and as they approached, they saw it opened into a wide square. With a massive fountain in the center, lights strung from posts around it, and live music playing by a small band, it appeared to be some sort of festival. Others were dancing and twirling to the music, couples crowded around the fountain, and a few food trucks were parked around the perimeter.

"Perfect place to rest and wait for Shadow to catch up." Sonic announced, "Ooh! They've even got chili dogs!"

Tails shook his head with a smile, "You and your chilidogs..."

"You spoke highly of the dish when we were in Camelot." Percival hummed, "Perhaps we might try it as well."

Sonic's eyes lit up like holiday trees, "Oh, you three are in for a treat!"

The square stood before the Londoon Museum of History, and Tails guessed it was part of their grounds and they must have some event going on for the night. Sonic didn't much care *how* the event was taking place, it was a bit of fun and joy after a long day or traveling and trying to keep a low profile.

He bought two chili dogs, having the three knights split the second to at least try it first. Though grateful for the opportunity to try local cuisine, Percival and Lancelot passed on it after a few bites and opted for the less spicy noodle dish Tails had ordered as a backup. Gawain, on the other hand, did kindly request for a chili dog of his own.

"This food fights against your tongue! I have never experienced the like!"

Sonic was more than willing.

Once finished with their meal, the group settled along the edge of the square, observing the crowds and city in motion as it began to settle for the night. The sunset cast the sky into brilliant colors of pink,

orange, and red, and as it settled into purple and a few stars emerged, Sonic caught sight of their missing companion.

"Aha. You found us." He greeted.

"Hmph. I should have known you'd be wasting time..." Shadow grumbled, taking a seat. "I was not able to find any leads."

"Well, you don't exactly know what to look for."

"Hmph."

They looked to the knights, who had gotten up to investigate the giant fountain up close. "...I'm trying not to overwhelm them too much, Shadow."

"You could do that faster by getting them home as soon as possible."

"Not everyone has never-waning energy to run around at all hours. Some of us need sleep, to rest." Sonic sighed, looking out over the crowd. "...Some of us like to actually *enjoy* the world sometimes, instead of constantly trying to keep it trouble-free."

"Wait, is that… *Silver* ?"

Sonic raised a brow and looked where Tails was pointing. Across the square, he could make out the hedgehog, stepping out of a sandwich shop with a sandwich wrapped in paper and appearing to be searching for somewhere to sit. "...Looks like it."

Shadow grumbled, "Don't tell me the situation's really that dire."

"What does he mean?" Gawain asked.

"Silver's- uh... a bit of a wandering spirit. A nice guy, but he only appears when the world is *literally* in danger of being destroyed."

"Are you concerned that our presence here *escalates* to that point?" Gawain asked with a furrowed brow.

Sonic sighed, "Only one way to find out..."
He led the way across the square, and the closer they got, the more clear it was that they were in fact looking at the time-traveler.
"Silver?"

Silver paused, closing his mouth from preparing to take his first bite of his sandwich, and looked to the approaching group. "Sonic? Shadow...

What are *you* doing here?"

"That's what we were going to ask *you* ." Shadow crossed his arms, "You only show up when there's big trouble on the horizon."

"Oh... Well," Silver placed his sandwich down on the wrapper, "Get used to that *not* being the case so much... I uh… I've decided to *stay* here. In the past."

"You... *Have* ?"

Silver shrugged, "I mean... I've spent so much of my time coming here, trying to keep the future safe, but... I realized that in order to *keep* it safe... It always seemed to involve me coming *back here."*

"So you figured that the best way to keep the future safe was to just stay here in the past?" Tails asked.

Silver nodded, "I've got friends here, closer friends and way *more* of them here than I ever did *there* . I've even gotten myself a part-time job, working with a local contractor to clear land for new buildings to be constructed or old ruins to be excavated for archeological research, and one of my new friends here even helped me get a place to live!"

Sonic smiled, "Wow, Silver... You're really putting the work in!"

"Well, Eggman's not gonna be threatening the world *forever* ! I'd like to have *something* to fall back on when we finally have the chance to just... Live as people, you know?"

"Wow..." Tails smirked, "To think that we might actually live in a world without Eggman attacking at random... That's a weird thought."

"And yet, it's a future I hope to help cultivate. I've been here, trying to keep a low-profile and get settled for about three months now..." Silver tilted his head, "So then, what are *you* all doing here in Londoon? I mean, world-traveling is a hobby of yours, Sonic, but you don't usually go sight-seeing with Shadow here."

"We're on a mission." Shadow crossed his arms and looked to the knights, who appeared to have been distracted by the vibrant patterns and colors of the sandwich shop's decorations on the outside. "We have three knights of Camelot to get back where they belong, but first we have to find their swords."

"Wait."

Silver stood up and looked to the three knights, "...Is that Lancelot, Gawain, and Percival?"

"You recognize them?"

Silver nodded, "One of my new friends studies Camelotian history and artifacts for a living, and he is always complaining that the *human* depictions of them are off. Humans like to rewrite stuff though, make things fit their own mold…"

“Eggman is a prime example…” Tails muttered.

“So you said their swords are missing?"

"Mmmhmm, ran away from Eggman when he brought them here. We think they'd come here to hide."

Silver wrapped his sandwich up again, "If anyone in the area would know where to find them, it'll be the Minkoffs. You should see their home! It's *covered* in... *Actually* ..." Silver rubbed his chin with a smile, "It *would* be an awesome treat for them to actually *meet* the knights, and I'm sure they'd have no problem housing you as long as you're here..."

"Are you just offering up someone else's home?"

"Trust me on this one. They will have no problem with it."

Sonic shrugged, "Works for me... Guys, we've got a potential lead on your blades!"

"Ah! Yes!"
The trio hurried over to them, and then widened their eyes.
"...Galahad?"

Silver shook his head, "I'm afraid not... But I *am* a friend." He sighed, pretending to write on his hand. "Add Sir Galahad to my lookalikes, apparently... My name is Silver. Come with me, who we're looking for isn't far..."

The Truth is Older Than Fiction

Silver led the way deeper into the city, winding through old streets winding down from the day. Doors and shutters were closing, lights turning out in the windows, and civilians saying farewell until tomorrow.

When he paused, it was in front of a large stone structure, the stone being dark in color and the windows of stained glass, depicting images of events long past.

"A church?" Shadow asked.

"Used to be. Hasn't been in decades, but they got the rights to make it a residential property. Oh, don't mind the graveyard out back. That was part of the deal."

"Right..." Sonic mumbled, following the light hedgehog through the wrought iron gate and fences towards the door. "Are you sure this place isn't haunted?"

"Don't worry, the inside looks a lot better..."
Silver went to the door and pulled a chain beside it. A loud bell rang from inside, and then they settled to wait for the homeowner to appear.

It only took a few moments, and then the wooden door creaked as it opened. "Hello...?"

"Mandolin, it's me. Plus a few friends."

"Oh! Hello, Silver..."
The door opened more, and a hedgehog woman with dark mango fur appeared at the door. Her eyes widened immediately, "And Sonic the Hedgehog... What a surprise to have *you* at my doorstep."

"Well, it's nice to know I have a reputation even *here* ."

"You've saved the world so many times, why would you not?" She gave a nod to Shadow and Tails, "Mr. Prower, Ultimate Lifeform."

"Hmph." Shadow grunted.

"Mandolin..." Silver gestured to the trio that stood closely behind him, "Look who we *found* ...!"

Mandolin's eyes widened even further as she noticed the knights, "Oh my... Come in, come in!"
She ushered each of them in, and then gave a low curtsy. "May our home be blessed! It is an *honor* to serve three of Arthur's most noble knights of the Round Table."

"You know of us?" Gawain asked.

"Indeed! I *too* am of Camelot... I am Mandolin, my village stood outside of the Deep Woods."

Sonic blinked, "You... *Came* from Camelot...?"

"Indeed!" She gave a curtsy to him as well, "King Arthur, Caliburn's chosen heir, it is an honor..."

"Please don't do that-"

"Hold on!"
A voice came from above, and they looked up to see a mink- greatly resembling Silver in fact- leaning over the edge of a balcony's railing. "I'm coming, I'm coming!"

Silver beamed, "I had a feeling you two would be excited about this."

" *Excited* !?"
The mink came down a flight of stairs, pulling a coat onto his shoulders and then giving a bow himself with a wide grin. "I've spent my entire *life* learning about your culture and lands! It is the *highest* honor to have you enter our home."

"Everyone, this is Venice and Mandolin Minkoff." Silver looked at the pair, "Guys, we have a situation."

"Quite! We will do whatever we can to help, of course." Mandolin informed, "What has happened?"

"Eggman brought them here from Camelot, but we're not really sure *why* , and then their swords took off. We have to find them." Tails informed, "Silver said you might know where to look for them?"

Mandolin clapped her hands together, "Oh, but of course! Surely they'd have split up, however. Though swords they may be, they are far too clever to make themselves such easy targets. No, they will have hidden themselves well, but where their wielders can find them." She gestured for them to follow her, "Come upstairs with me, I will show

you..."

She led the group upstairs to the second level, where past the balcony railing was a wide array of screens, scanners, and a massive table in the center adorned with small bits and baubles, as well as a massive map of the area with other lines drawn across it. "This map is both the current region, and how Camelot used to look."

Sonic hurried to the edge of the table to examine the map. "Londoon was Camelot once?"

"Indeed! It was many, many ages ago, but it's not mere myth. It is history forgotten and thrown into tales for children, rather than properly recorded as fact."

" *Apparently,* the idea of a land of dragons and magical knights is too far-fetched for the modern audience to believe." Venice grumbled, "And yet a monster slumbering in the center of the planet that shatters it every few millennia or a water-god that destroyed an entire civilization is perfectly reasonable!"

"Here is where the castle town once laid." Mandolin pointed to a place outside of the capital's perimeter, "That is where we have come across most of the artifacts we've turned in to the museum. We keep the *cursed* ones locked away, for good measure."

" *Obviously* ..." Sonic mumbled, "...Deep Woods, Titanic Plain, Misty Lake, the Molten Mine... How much of it still stands?"

Mandolin sighed, "Not much, I'm afraid. What *has* been preserved is buried deep below the ground, and some of it was torn apart during Dark Gaia's awakening."

Venice hummed sadly, "Many tombs and crypts were horribly raided and plundered as well. The bodies of fallen warriors and loved ones smashed into dust..."

"What sacrilege!" Gawain growled, "How dare they desecrate the resting places of someone's beloved?"

"Agreed." Venice sighed, "While my job is to find and investigate such sites, I have always made it my mission to respect the dead."

"So then," Tails overlooked the map, "Where do you think the *swords* would have gone?"

"I was always told of Arondight's preference for the Deep Woods and the crystalline caves that were present there." Mandolin murmured, looking at Lancelot. "What do you say, Sir Lancelot?"

Lancelot nodded, "Indeed... The Deep Woods would be a suitable place. If it is still as dense and enchanted as it once was-"

"Perhaps even *more* so." Venice admitted, "It is called the Tangled Gardens now, and every time in recent history someone has tried to tear it down for construction, their efforts are sabotaged by mysterious means."

"What about Galatine or Lavatein?" Sonic asked.

"Lavatein would head for somewhere hot," Percival informed, "What is left of the Molten Mines where the two of us first engaged would be a fine spot, if it is still present."

"The lava flows have waned over the ages," Mandolin pointed to the old location, "But, there are still some of the old tunnels- reopened by earthquakes- and hot springs nearby."

"I met Lancelot in Deep Woods, Percival in Molten Mines, and Gawain in the Titanic Plain. Is that where Galatine would go?"

"Titanic Plain has been cultivated into homes and towns. I do not believe Galatine would want to go where they might be easily seen or taken by others." Mandolin hummed softly, "...We will find them, but until then, I propose we start by checking the Tangled Gardens and Burning Springs for Lavatein and Arondight. We can set out for Galatine once we have clues."

"Very well. When do we depart?" Percival asked.

"Tomorrow morning. It is far too dangerous to try and traverse there in the dark, especially when the Tangled Gardens are already dim in broad daylight."

Sonic sighed, "We're barely tired... Thanks, time difference..."

"Rest assured, hero of the world." Venice grinned, "It will catch up to you shortly... Londoon City has that way with tourists."

Shadow crossed his arms, "I don't sleep, what do you expect me to do all night? I'm not going to just stand by twiddling my thumbs-"

"You, Mr. Shadow, can help me with *my* end of things." Venice announced, gesturing to a large array of computers across the balcony from them. He sat down in the chair, "You said Dr. Eggman brought these three here for some reason... Let us see if we can't find out what that reason is."

Shadow nodded, "That'll answer a *few* questions."

"Excellent." Mandolin informed, "I will get the guest rooms prepared for you all."

Silver nodded, "I'll head home, then. See you all in the morning."

"Didn't you say you have a job?"

"Lucky for you, it's my off-day tomorrow..."

The travelers' rooms were all ready and settled within the hour.

Lancelot, Percival and Gawain were all in one room, while Sonic and Tails were in another. Fortunately, Silver had been right, and the *interior* of the former gothic cathedral had been updated to be less creepy. Painted walls, fresh curtains, and a lack of dust certainly did wonders for a room.

The knights and Tails all went to bed and were asleep quickly, worn out from the long day, but Sonic laid on the cot set up for him, staring up at the ceiling and unable to let his mind rest. Too many questions unanswered, too much going on.

Eggman brought the knights here from Camelot, which apparently was a distant time and not just some storybook legend. Mandolin was *also* supposedly from there but was now here and building a life here. How had she gotten here? Why hadn't she gone home when she arrived?... *Was* there a way home? Was this whole plan all for nothing? What could they do if that was true?

He sat up, carefully getting up from the cot and tiptoeing out of the room without disturbing Tails. His genius brother, who'd jumped into this adventure with him without needing much explanation, just like he always did...

Sonic wandered down the corridor back to the balcony, finding Venice still sitting at the desk, Shadow leaning against a pillar beside it, and

Mandolin overlooking the map and other papers carefully.

"Can't sleep?" Mandolin asked without looking up.

"Nah... Too much to think about."

"Hmph." Shadow grunted, "Well, then you might as well start talking. What's up with the knights? Why are they so devoted to *you* , of all people?"

"I have a natural knack for inspiring people?" Sonic joked, but only got suspicious silence. "...Okay, fine."
He sat down on the edge of the table, "A few years back, I was summoned to Camelot by a magician named Merlina. She said that Camelot's ruler, King Arthur, had been corrupted by the Scabbard of Excalibur, and that she needed help defeating him to save the kingdom from destruction."

"So naturally, you agreed without thinking much of it."

Sonic glared a bit at Shadow's irritated response, "You know I did. In the process of stopping Arthur, I met Lancelot, Gawain, and Percival. I earned their respect and allegiance, and then after defeating King Arthur, they saw me as their new king, their new ruler. As such, they will do whatever I ask of them. They are bound by oath to do so."

"Oath-Bound, you say."

"Yes, Shadow. They're not just some fans following me around and singing my praises. They're my... Well, my knights. Their task is to serve me however they can."
He turned to Mandolin, "What about *you* , Mandolin? How did you get here?"

Mandolin smiled, "Time-Travel at a normal rate."

"Come again?"

"When I was a girl, I lived in Camelot, but shortly after the events you described, there was an… an incident." Mandolin rubbed her arm, "...I was turned to stone. A statue. Because of my own powers over stone, I didn't die, but was in a deep slumbering state."

Venice turned from the screens, "A few years back, I was at an event when I saw her in the homeowner's personal collection. Something about her... Caught my attention. Something told me she wasn't any

ordinary statue, so I convinced him to let me buy her from him. After that, I tried to figure out what she was."

"You knew she was alive in there." Shadow guessed.

"I thought it was only a hunch, but then again..." Venice tapped his temple, "I'm a telepath, so looking back, I think I was getting faint psychic signals from her. Anyway, I had in my *own* collection a pendant said to be able to dispel curses..."

Mandolin pulled the pendant out where Sonic and Shadow could see. Tarnished and with a blue stone, it wouldn't seem significant if you saw it in a jewelry store, but she held onto it like it was the most valuable thing in the world. "I've... Been afraid to see what might happen if I take it *off* ."

Venice shrugged, "She handled the culture-shock well, and... We got married about a year ago. Because she's from Camelot, her first-hand knowledge has been *invaluable* in identifying artifacts- cursed ones, especially."

"Probably for the best..." Sonic hummed, "...Where have you been digging?"

Mandolin used her finger to circle an area on the map, "Archeological digs are being completed all over the place, but *we've* been focusing on the Misty Lake area, now known as Dragon Fang Lake." She gave the blue hedgehog a light smile, "Can only imagine how it got *that* name..."

"Can't imagine." Sonic grinned back, "Find anything interesting?"

"Armor, tools, a few blades..." Her smile vanished, "But... Not the blade I was *hoping* to find."

Sonic's stomach clenched a bit. He hadn't thought about that. If Camelot was the distant past, then that means that Caliburn existed here once. Just about *anything* could have happened to him: Buried in the soil to rust, destroyed by a natural disaster, stolen from his resting place and held up in some collector's vault, never again to see the light of day...

Mandolin seemed to know what he was thinking, as she placed a hand on his shoulder. "But we will *soon* , I'm sure. The types of artifacts we've been finding lately tells me we're getting close, I can feel it!"

"...Soon... I hope you're right..." He cleared his throat, "Any progress on Eggman? What's his endgame here?"

"Hmm... Based on the camera footage I've gotten, he's been pretty quiet lately, but experience proves *that* means he's plotting something." Venice looked back to his screens, "I've located some of his robots combing *this* region in passing weeks, though. They appear to be looking for something as well, even *before* the knights arrived."

"You said their swords are powerful." Shadow remarked, "And that's just *individually* . What could they do if brought together?"

"Awaken the true king's spirit." Venice murmured, "So the tales go. Forge a weapon unrivaled by any known, unbroken by battle or time."

"Excalibur..." Sonic hummed, "...But none of the knights have him."

"Then perhaps he summoned them to know how to find it." Mandolin murmured, "I do not know Eggman's mind as well as *you* might, Sonic."

"Pssh. *Nobody* knows what goes on in the Egghead, probably not even Egghead *himself* . We just need to make sure he doesn't try to stop us from getting the swords back and the knights back to Camelot where they belong."

Shadow nodded firmly with a grunt, "The sooner, the better..."

The Search Begins

Morning didn't come fast enough.

Sonic laid on the cot, closing his eyes and trying desperately to sleep, but only finding himself in intermittent periods of dozing. The sounds of the cathedral were all too familiar... There was a faint creaking of wooden beams in the wind, the whispers of air through the cracks in the stone walls, a crackling like tiny flames licking at the edges of torch wicks... The sounds of an ancient building, the sounds of a familiar castle that had been his home for a time.

He opened his eyes for what felt like the dozenth time, and thanked Chip immensely for bringing the sunrise to him. He sat up, stretching and then looking to see Tails also rousing from sleep. "Morning, Tails..."

The fox yawned from behind his pair of tails peeking out from under the blanket, his tiny fangs glinting even in the low light. "Mornin', Sonic... What's the plan...?"

"Today? We find Lancelot and hopefully Percival's swords, and then we get to locating Gawain's and get them home by tomorrow."

"Hmm... Sounds good..."
He yawned again, and then finally sat up and stretched as well, "...Gotta sit up or I'll be going right back to sweet dreams."

"What kind of dreams?"

"Mmm... I was making a new kind of laser blaster for the Tornado and it blew up Eggman's hot air balloon by accident."

Sonic beamed, "Atta boy! Way to put a pin in Egghead's ego!"

They both turned as the door opened, Shadow giving an eyeroll and crossing his arms. "Whenever you two are done being sickeningly affectionate, there's breakfast downstairs."

"You can't just barge in on the king unannounced!" They heard Gawain complain as he appeared behind the dark hedgehog, "At least have the decency to *knock* !"

" *Funny* ..." Sonic teased, "...That's not what *you* did when you saw a *rat* sneak under the door and into my quarters that one time."

"Your health was at stake!"

"Very well, very well." Percival shoved the echidna away and down the hall, giving the pair in the room a brief smile. "Good morning, Sir Sonic, Miles."

"Morning, Percival." Tails greeted, and then pulled the blanket off of himself. "The sooner we get started, the sooner we can make sure those swords are safe and sound."

"And the knights out of our fur..." Shadow grumbled, walking away.

Sonic's ears folded a hint as he too grumbled. Why was it so hard for Shadow to be nice about this whole deal? It wasn't *Sonic's* fault it happened!

The smell of breakfast caught his nose as he exited the room, and he and Tails followed it down the stairs and into a small alcove of the ground floor, where a round table sat with benches all around it. The kitchen was adjacent, and Mandolin stood over an old, wood-burning stove, stirring something in a large pot.

"Good morning, everyone." She greeted, "The oatmeal is almost thickened."

"Thank you, Mandolin."
Sonic took a seat beside Lancelot, who seemed to be trying to avoid eye contact with Shadow as the pair sat across from each other. Sonic knew the look on his closest knight's face- he had questions. He had many, many questions, but was keeping them to himself and it was getting harder and harder to keep them contained.

Perhaps today he and Lance could get a few moments of solitude from Shadow to answer a few of them.

"So here's what I was thinking," Venice took a slice of apple from a plate in the center of the table, inviting the others to do the same. "We'll split into two groups. One can check the hot springs for Lavatein, and the other will search the Tangled Gardens for Arondight."

"I vote that Percival and Lancelot each head their own group," Tails also took a slice of apple, "They'd know their swords best, and if they're hiding, they'd be more likely to come out from those places if their knight's there, right?"

"Correct." Venice gave glances to the pair, "Do either of you have preferences on who should accompany you?"

Percival tapped the table with a finger, "Well, both of us surely would prefer to have our king with us, but clearly he cannot be in two places at once."

"I could try." Sonic gave a nod and a smile as Mandolin offered him a bowl of oatmeal first, "But it would probably not be very productive... Lance?"

"I too would be pleased to have the king accompany me, but more so would I like *Shadow* ."

The ultimate lifeform's head tilted up, his eyes wider than usual while still maintaining that irritated gaze. " *Me* ?"

"Yes." Lancelot gave a nod, "I would like to know more about you, since you and the king seem to have... *History* ."

The scowl returned, Shadow crossing his arms and looking away. "Hmph... Fine."

"Very well."

"I'll go with Percival, if that's alright." Tails smiled as the cat nodded in agreement, "I'd like to get some readings on the hot springs while we're there."

"I will also go with Percival," Gawain decided, "In order to ensure the kit's safety."

"Thanks, Gawain." Tails murmured, looking a little embarrassed to be called a kit.

"Well, then I guess I'm with Lancelot." Sonic decided, giving both of the dark hedgehogs warning glances. "Someone's gotta keep an eye on these two..."

"You worry about leaving me unattended, my king?" Lancelot asked.

" *You're* not the problem, Lancelot..." Sonic gave Shadow a glare, and the Ultimate Lifeform returned it.

"Then it's settled." Mandolin handed bowls to each of the others at the table, disrupting the tension. "I'll let Silver know when he arrives and he can join whichever group he wants."

Sonic sighed as he took a bite of his oatmeal, "Chaos, I hope Galatine didn't split up..."

"What do you mean?" Tails asked.

"My blade is both one and two." Gawain replied, "Two blades, identical to one another, that respond to one name, and act as one blade. They are like twins... Lost without the other."

"We'll find them *too* , I promise. But Arondight and Lavatein are the ones we have leads on right now... Eat quickly, everyone." Sonic sat up a little straighter, "We leave as soon as everyone is ready."

The nice thing about the trio that was headed for the Tangled Gardens was that Sonic knew Shadow and Lancelot could both *keep up* with him.

Unlike the hot springs- which had become an attraction for some tourists and was open to the public- The Tangled Gardens was restricted to only a certain few for safety reasons. Tails, Percival and Gawain were able to get a tourist transport out to the springs, but there were no roads leading where the hedgehogs were headed- not roads that had been used in a very, very long time. It was for this reason Lancelot had once more donned his armor while Gawain and Percival remained in their civilian outfits- there was nobody out here to see and gawk at him in it.

Sonic was glad to get out and run however, dashing across open fields, waving at townsfolk as he passed farms and homes, which grew more and more sparse as they made their way. The ancient roads under his feet- though invisible under layers of grass and shrubs- led the way from the capital and out into the wilds. Shadow and Lancelot followed closely behind, Lancelot out of respect for his king, and Shadow because he had no idea where they were going, or else he'd probably have insisted on taking point.

Sonic felt the aura of the woods long before they appeared, and he came to a stop at the edge of a small ridge to look out towards it. "...Wow... Mandolin wasn't kidding when she said it had grown..."

Lancelot nodded in equal shock, "Indeed..."

Though the sky above *was* cloudy and gray, the woods seemed to swallow any light surrounding it. The trees had grown high and

indeed tangled into a massive canopy overhead, branches and trunks wrapping together like fur unbrushed for months. The trunks were dark- almost black in color- and the leaves not much brighter.

"...The magic that once kept it in check has become untethered." Lancelot hummed, "...It grows without anyone to control it."

"Nothing but a super-powered weed killer." Sonic murmured.
The ground leading up to the trees was practically bare- no more than random patches of sun-burnt shrubbery. Either the trees were sucking up all of the nutrients in the ground and leaving nothing to grow within their roots' reach, or the government had been killing anything that tried to spread.

"Are you still certain this is where your sword would go?" Shadow asked.

Lancelot nodded, "Though the woods have changed, he knows I will search for him here..."

"Well, if anything, it looks like Eggman would have a heck of a hard time getting to him... Let's go."

The trio continued on their way towards the edges of the woods, walking along the perimeter for a good place to enter. "...The remnants of the road will probably do us no good now."

"Agreed." Lancelot reached out and placed a hand on one of the trunks. All three of them looked up as it seemed to shiver, and then- slowly- it bent aside, allowing them to see beyond it. "... *Incredible* ..."

"Looks like you have the magic touch, Lance. Lead the way."

Lancelot nodded, "Keep close. We do not know what remaining perils await..."

The knight stepped into the darkness, offering a hand to help Sonic up and over the roots.

"Don't even think about it." Shadow grumbled as he refused Lancelot's offer to aid him as well.

The knight pulled back, "...Very well."

"We're barely into the woods and you're already being rude." Sonic muttered. " *Again* ."

"I don't need any help from you, or him, or *anyone* . I am-"

"The Ultimate Lifeform. I know... You will never let us forget it."

"Pssh. Whatever, *King Sonic.* "

Sonic didn't reply, but felt his quills rise just a hint, and he ran his fingers across them to smooth them back down.

Lancelot's face shifted again, that look of having much to ask but doubting the right to do so.

Sonic sighed, "...I give you permission to speak freely, Lancelot. What's on your mind?"

Lancelot leaned a little closer to Sonic, his voice lowering. "Arthur... Why do you put up with such *disrespect* from him? Even if you were *not* a king, you seem to refrain from defending your honor."

"It's not worth it... I don't like to get into fights if I can help it."

"Hmph. *That's a lie.*"

Sonic paused as Shadow spoke, putting his hands on his hips. "... *Excuse me?"*

Shadow didn't even turn back his way as he stepped over a large log, "You *love* getting into fights. If you're not in a fight with something, you're avoiding the responsibility of cleaning up after your last one."

"That's not true."

Shadow then stopped, turning to face the hero. "Do you have any idea how many hours I've spent with GUN cleaning up robots? Broken walls? Helping civilians out of the rubble? And where are *you* ? Off on another adventure or punching the lights out of some other monster Eggman's awakened."

"See? There it is. *Eggman* . *He's* the one who's blasting walls down and sending his robots after people, that's not *my* fault! And I do the best I can not to break anything but the robots when I do have to fight."

The officer growled, looking at Lancelot for a moment and then back to Sonic. "Hmph. *'Have to…'* We wouldn't even *be* in this situation if not for you being a glory-hound."

Sonic's ears pricked, and Lancelot saw his quills bristle a little bit

again. "... *Say again* ?" Sonic muttered, a little venom in his tone.

Lancelot reached to place a hand on Sonic's shoulder, "Do not let him get to you, Arthur. I know it isn't true."

The blue hedgehog stood up straighter, facing the other dark hedgehog. "Either way, I'm curious how you think that *this* is somehow my fault…!"

Shadow turned and returned the glare, "It *is* , isn't it? You *always* do this, you go off somewhere and have some dramatic adventure and it always comes to bite the rest of us. Broken homes, shattered roads, entire *regions* in a wreck because *you* can't say *no* to a fight!"

Sonic's brows furrowed, "Oh ho ho, I can say no to a *fight* , Shadow. I can say no to a fight, but what I *can't* say no to is people's lives in danger and them coming to me for *help* ! I didn't *choose* to *go* to Camelot, I was summoned against my will!"

"But you *did* choose to go ahead and defeat their previous ruler without a moment's hesitation, didn't you? You saw a fight coming up and rushed in like you always do."

"They *needed* me!"

" *They* needed *help* , but *not* from you specifically! You had no ties to Camelot before, you had *no reason* to feel obligated to step in!"

"Oh, *that's* rich, coming from *you* !"

"Oh yeah? And why is *that* !?"

"Because the only reason *you* care about *this planet* is because a dead girl *asked you to* !"
Both hedgehogs were silent for a moment, and Sonic's anger then went out like a snuffed candle as Shadow's went supernova. "...Oh geez-"

The Sword of the Knight of the Lake

Sonic knew he'd thrown a low blow even as the words escaped his lips, but it was too late to pull them back now.

As Shadow wound up and bolted forward to slam into Sonic, the hedgehog wasn't even sure whether he should dodge or take the beating; he deserved it, after all. But something *else* slammed into *Shadow first,* knocking him back and then rolling across the soil. Sonic also jumped back as something massive came crashing down from above, sending dust flying up into the air.

As the dust settled, Sonic saw Lancelot getting up off of Shadow, brushing himself off, and between them, resting in the dirt, was a massive bear-trap.

"You're welcome." Lancelot snipped, walking back around the trap as Shadow stared with wide eyes at the metal contraption. "Are you harmed,Arthur?"

"I...No." Sonic breathed, taking the knight's hand and being lifted to his feet. " *Forgot* about those things... Geez."

Shadow got up to his feet, "What in Chaos' name do you need traps of this size for?"

"Mark my words, Shadow, Ultimate Lifeform..." Lancelot glared, "You do not wish to ever have to face them."

"Right..." Sonic looked to the branches, "Watch for giant swinging spikes too..." He looked ahead, "If we can reach the Behemoth Tree in the center, we might be able to get a better view of the forest as a whole. Then, we can- *Augh!* "
Sonic stumbled backwards as Shadow's fist met with his nose, Lancelot catching him before he hit the ground.

"Arthur!"
Lancelot's grip on his arms tightened as he helped Sonic sit down, sparkles blinding his vision from the impact. "Have you no shame!? Attacking the king in such a manner is dishonorable!"

"He should've kept his guard up." Shadow muttered.

Right, Shadow was about to hit him for his comment before this. The

stars in Sonic's view faded and he brought a hand to his nose to make sure it wasn't bleeding. "Augh... H-He's right..." He whispered, getting up once more. "...I lost focus..."

"It is still unacceptable." Lancelot grumbled, "Grudges should be settled in duels of combat, not in ambush."

"What, would you rather I send him a letter of invitation to settle things personally and then meet him in some clearing?"

"That is how is done in Camelot-"

"*Camelot's dead*!" Shadow snapped, "Has been for centuries. This is how things are now."

"No..."
Sonic looked the other hedgehog in the eye, "...This is how *you* are, Shadow. You say *I'm* always itching for a fight? What about *you* ? You'll punch and kick the lights out of anyone and anything you feel needs it to prove you're the greatest being to exist, because that title of yours is the only thing left of your old life that you still have."

Sonic pointed to Lancelot, "Lancelot's world came crumbling down *too* . I was there, but he didn't let it harden him. He used it as fuel to keep living and caring for the people left behind, rather than sulking and feeling sorry for himself all the time! And now you have the *gall* to try and tell him that he should just let go of his moral code and traditions just because he's not at home anymore? Shameful."

Lancelot's hand touched Sonic's shoulder from behind, "... *Now* you're sounding like our king again. I missed that tenacity."

Sonic smiled a bit, but then the seriousness returned, and he looked back to Shadow. "This is why I insisted on coming with you two. I know both of you well enough to know that *someone* needed to be the one in the middle of you two... Let's keep going."

Sonic pointed to the looming shape ahead, "We reach the Behemoth tree, we can get a bird's eye view of the forest and find any potential hiding spots for Arondight." His brows furrowed, " *Arondight* . That's why we're here, remember?"

"Of course." Lancelot nodded, "Arondight."

"How can you flip back and forth between being this obnoxious thrill-seeker and some sage of a leader that everyone seems willing to die

for?" Shadow crossed his arms, "It's pathetic you have to put on a mask."

Sonic tilted his head towards his rival, "A mask, perhaps... But which face is the mask and which is real...?"

The question hung in the trees as the trio continued on their way. Each thought they had the answer, but argument would do none of them any good now. They needed to find Arondight and then leave this wilderness as soon as possible.

"Listen..." Shadow whispered, "...There's no wind or even birds."

"It is as dead as it is alive." Lancelot hummed, "...A heart beats, but the body is numb."

Sonic walked to one of the trees, feeling its rough bark. "...You can feel it too... A sadness over the entire forest...Like it's *mourning* something-"

Chirp!

Lancelot and Sonic's ears pricked at the whistling sound that came from somewhere ahead, "...Arondight!?" Sonic called out, "Arondight, we're coming!"

"What was that?" Shadow asked as the other two picked up speed.

"Arondight chirps when he's upset." Sonic hopped over a large root, "He didn't make any sound at all until after Excalibur reawakened him from a slumbering state... Arondight!?" He looked around, "Arondight, it's Arthur and Lancelot! If you can hear us, give us a sign!"

The forest was dead silent otherwise, so another chirp wasn't that hard to hear.

"This way!"
Lancelot led the way, hopping over roots and dodging rocks, while his touch on the trees' trunks bent them aside to reveal their path. As they made their way, the path widened, the darkness lifting, until it opened out, and the trio of hedgehogs stopped at the edge of a massive clearing. "...It cannot be...!"

Sonic's eyes were just as wide as he overlooked the open space that dipped down and had once been a sparkling expanse. "Nimue's Lake, it's... *Gone* ...!"

"It *has* been centuries." Shadow reminded.

"Yes, but..." Sonic's shoulders slumped, "...I had... I had *hoped* ..." He bent down and felt the ground, "...The trees have neither overtaken the soil nor robbed it of its nutrients... Maybe she just went into-"

Chirp!

The sound came from somewhere out in the expanse. With no trees or bushes, all the shallow valley held was waving grass and what appeared to be the ruined remains of Nimue's pavilion, but there was no sign of a glistening sword in the sea of grass. "...Arondight? We *hear* you, but where *are* you?"

Chirp!

"Is it just me, or does that sound like it's *echoing* off somewhere...?" Shadow murmured, his ears swiveling.

Chirp!

"Indeed... From *there* ." Lancelot pointed out towards the ruined pavilion.

He led the way to the ruins, the broken stone and metal twisted and crumbled by time. Where the benches once stood- surrounding a table where Sonic had enjoyed tea with the Lady of the Lake, Sonic could see a hole below them, darkness staring back.

"Check it out..." Sonic pushed some of the stone away, and as the light fell on what lay below, he could make out steps. "...A stairwell."

"Only one way to know what's down there..." Shadow grumbled.

"Agreed. Help me move this debris."

"At once, my king."
Lancelot bent down and hauled large chunks of stone away, exposing a jagged but decently-sized entrance to the stairwell. They had to duck under the ceiling as they entered, but once they had made a few steps down into the darkness, they could feel a sheer size beside them. Stairs leading into the dark, with no railing, and no idea how far down they went.

"I don't suppose anyone brought a flashlight." Sonic hummed.

"Allow me."

Lancelot snapped his fingers, bringing a chaos spear to alight in his hand without even speaking the words. Unlike Shadow's, it didn't crackle and pop with loose energy on the edges, instead resembling more like a glowing shard of glass than energy. The light radiated out into the darkness, and Sonic's eyes widened as even then, the edges of the cavern could not be seen.

"You... Can use chaos energy *too* ?" Shadow murmured.

"Of course. I was blessed with the gift by the Lady of the Lake herself when she raised me from a young child. It is how I came to be known as the Knight of the Lake."

Shadow didn't give a response, but Sonic sensed a shift in his demeanor. He then watched him pick up a decent-sized chunk from one step that had broken off. "What're you *doing* ?"

Shadow didn't speak directly, but gave a soft grunt as he threw the stone out into the darkness. Silence, silence... *Plunk* !

"Sounds like the lake drained down here at one time." He mumbled.

Chirp!

"We're coming, Arondight!" Sonic called out.

The trio made their way until the steps disappeared, replaced by soft, small gravel under their feet as they walked through the darkness... That is, until Sonic heard his foot splash into the water on the edge.

The hedgehogs jumped back and covered their eyes as their surroundings all lit up at once, but once their eyes had adjusted to the sudden light, they looked to see the water had ignited into color like an aurora, casting light up into the air and onto the walls of a mighty cavern, the stairs having led them down into the center of it with water on all sides. Blues, greens, and lavender swirled and danced all about them.

Chirp! Chirp!

Lancelot looked out, and he lifted his visor with a smile as his blade came rushing towards them from across the water. "There you are! You had me worried..."

Arondight chirped and whistled excitedly, hovering in mid-air and spinning rapid circles around his knight. His sheath was partially on

his blade like a tasseled hat, the belt swinging back and forth as he greeted them.

Then he noticed Sonic, and the chirps came louder and more excited, spinning around Sonic's head faster.

Sonic chuckled, "Yes! Yes, it's good to see you *too* , Arondight. Careful with that blade of yours, huh? Sharpest tool in the hilt, remember?"

Shadow grunted in irritation, but then the sword noticed *him* as well. It also moved around him, but not as quickly. It hummed softly, as if looking him over and studying him. "What? What do you want?" Shadow complained.

After a moment, the sword chirped again, and Lancelot grinned. "Oh no, he's not. He does resemble me though..."

"What did he ask?" Shadow asked.

Lancelot patted the sword's hilt, "He asked if you were my *son* ..."

The ultimate lifeform scoffed, crossing his arms and looking away. "As if we're *anything* alike."

Sonic smirked, "Looks, powers... All it takes is an attitude adjustment-"

"Don't start, hedgehog."

So... The Knight of the Wind returns to Camelot soil...

Sonic's eyes widened as the voice spoke, and then both he and Lancelot dropped to their knees and bowed their heads. "Lady Nimue, you *are* still present..."

Of course... This lake is my home, no matter its elevation... And the Knight of the Lake stands beside you...

"It is a blessing to hear your voice again, Lady Nimue..."

And I yours, Sir Lancelot... When Arondight came to me for safety, I feared the worst had come to you.

"No such luck."
Sonic lifted his head, not seeing the spirit so instead looking into the glowing water before him. "We are on a quest to recover Galatine and Lavatein as well... Have you any knowledge as to where they may be?"

Indeed... Percival and Gawain are indeed following the paths of Lavatein... Galatine lies in another place, one beyond my influence, instead guarded by another spirit...

The water rippled, and Sonic looked down as the colors formed a vague image... Green hovering over blue.

Sonic's lips spread into a grin, "I know the place... Angel Island. Of course it would go to Knuckles. Does he know?"

I am not certain... You would seek this place out. It will yield the answers...

"Of course."
Lancelot looked up as Arondight settled by his side, "Thank you for looking after him, Lady Nimue... I assure you, we will not be separated again."

Nimue laughed, *I have no doubt... I will speak to you all soon, some here... some above and before...*

Sonic gave the water another bow as the image of their next location faded, and then stepped back. "Wait... Lady Nimue."

You ask of me, chosen one of Caliburn...

"That's just it... Do you know where *he* lies now?"

Sadly, his slumber has left him lost... Only your hand can wake him, only then will I sense his presence once more...

Sonic nodded slowly. Caliburn was only *sleeping* , not dead or destroyed. That eased his concerns a little, but still, that fear would not subside until he knew for certain. He had to know... He had to find him. Perhaps not now, but he'd want to check in with Mandolin and Venice to see if they'd made any headway. Mandolin had seemed determined to ensure the sword's safety as well...

"So now what?" Shadow asked.

"We'll meet up with the others and make sure Lavatein's okay. If Galatine's on Angel Island, I have a feeling they hid themselves so good in those caves and jungle that it'll take a *native* to find them. There's only one of those, and I have a feeling he's not going to be leaving the Master Emerald unguarded now that Eggman's active again." He looked to the water, "Thank you, Nimue... For everything."

It is my honor to serve the true king and his knights...

"I am not one of his servants." Shadow defended, "...My lady."

Very well... Shadow of the Sky... I give you a gift...

The hedgehog raised a brow, and then saw something float to the top of the water. Sheathed but appearing completely dry as he pulled it from the water, it was another blade, different from Arondight.

"Ah... Secace..." Lancelot hummed, "I *too* used that blade, during the time Arthur held Arondight following our duel."

Sonic smirked, "I was planning on giving him *back* ... Secace is said to only be wielded by the true of heart, you know."

"Indeed."

Shadow pulled the blade from the sheath and examined it. "I don't have much use for a sword. I can fight just as well *without* one."

"Necessity isn't the point." Sonic leaned closer, "First of all, don't refuse a gift from a spirit, *trust me* . And second, even if you *are* the Ultimate Lifeform, wouldn't you like to add the title of Ultimate Swordsman to that as well...?"

Lancelot gave the same slight smirk, "I can offer you guidance, if you wish."

Shadow gave them a look, and then slowly sheathed the blade and buckled it to his waist. "Fine. I'll keep it... It's not going to start flying around *too,* is it?"

Lancelot did the same with Arondight, "Splendid! And no, it is not enchanted the same as Arondight. Now, I suggest we leave this place to reconvene with our companions. Shall we...?"

One Found, Three Lost

"How do you think Sir Sonic, Shadow, and Lancelot are faring in *their* task?"

Tails was about to think about all the ways it could *not* be going well, but gave the echidna a smile. "I'm sure it's going fine, Gawain. I mean, we haven't heard otherwise, right?"

At least the three hedgehogs didn't have to worry about tourists getting in the way of their search.

Tails didn't have any qualms with the others here at the Hot Springs *exactly* , but it was hard to look for clues- or a missing magical sword- while also having to dodge photographs being taken and tour guides begging their charges to *please* stay on the platforms and away from the geysers themselves.

"I don't care if you can run fast, those things can go off at a moment's notice, Sir." A cheetah replied to a dad wanting to hold their child out over a geyser for a photo op. "Not even Sonic could outrun one of these guys, trust me!"

Percival grinned at the remark, though trying not to make her eavesdropping clear. "The king truly is well-known, isn't he?"

"Probably the most well-known person on the planet." Tails hummed, pulling out his binoculars and searching the surrounding area for signs of glinting metal. "He's saved it enough times that you'd have to live pretty isolated to not know about him... Heh, *Knuckles* lives on Angel Island all by himself and even *he* knows Sonic."

"What kinds of perils have you faced?"

"Rudely awakened gods, mostly. Dr. Eggman has a knack for that... Sometimes it's a natural disaster, other times some rogue machine that is terrorizing the countryside... but mostly Eggman."

"And... Shadow?" Percival rubbed her arms as if cold, "...What ill does he have towards Sir Sonic?"

Tails sighed, pulling his binoculars down. "Shadow's... Been through some things. When he was little, an army invaded his village and killed everyone while taking him hostage, including his sister, Maria.

He's kinda had a hard time being happy ever since then."

"What was the invading force after?" Gawain asked.

"Shadow himself. He's pretty powerful, and they wanted to make him into a weapon for their own ends... I don't really *know* why he dislikes Sonic so much. I guess he just thinks that Sonic doesn't take anything seriously."

"Well, then he does not know Sir Sonic well..." Percival leaned against the railing of the platform's barrier, "...I witnessed your brother serve the people of Camelot, more than was *ever* asked of him... He cares deeply for others."

Tails smiled, "He does..."

Sonic had certainly changed during his time in the past, though. Tails remembered the day he came back, having been missing for a few weeks with none of their friends having any clue where he'd gone after he'd told Tails all he was going to do was get some chili dogs and then be right back.

Even *Eggman* had seemed to be searching for him.

And then one evening, he appeared at the door, acting like he hadn't seen Tails in years, having grown a bit, and bearing healed wounds far too old for just a few weeks' worth of healing. Sonic hadn't stated exactly how long he'd been gone- perhaps he didn't know- only that it had felt longer than a few weeks. Tails hadn't had the heart to press further- he'd seemed shaken by the experience- but perhaps the knights would be more likely to talk.

"...How long was he with-"

"Shh... Listen."
Percival's ears were pricked, looking out across the hot springs. "...Did you hear that?"

"Hear what?"

Percival's brows furrowed, "...I thought I heard Lavatein..."

"Heard her?"

"The blades make vocalizations on their own..." Gawain whispered, "Galatine's more of a hum, Arondight chirps like a bird, and Lavatein-"

" *Sings* !"
Percival pointed across the hot springs, towards where the geysers ended and a large stone wall rose up on one side. "Over there!"

Tails lifted the binoculars and looked around where she pointed, "...I don't see anything..."

"Trust me. I know my blade."

"Not saying I don't trust you..." Tails overlooked the crowds, "...But it's going to be hard to reach her with all of these tour guides watching everyone's every move."

"Would it be easier to spot her if we were atop that ridge?" Gawain asked.

"Maybe, but I think it's still considered off-limits to the public-"
The fox jumped as one of the geysers shot up, water spraying out in a plume of steam. "...Plus the geysers can go off without warning."

"Hmm... A troublesome predicament... We do not wish to defy laws, nor support the defiance by others, but our task is still of immense importance..." Gawain rubbed his chin, "What to do...?"

Tails grinned, it was almost hilarious how different Gawain's speech and mannerisms were to Knuckles, despite the two being almost identical to each other in looks.

His own ears then pricked as he heard it now... A shrill note like a flute, ringing out from across the land. "I heard it *too* !"

"She sounds distressed." Gawain searched as well, "I would not be concerned about her getting too hot to lose her shape, she is used to it from this region many times, but she has turned out to be a skittish and nervous blade-"

"There!"

The singing sound came from one of the geysers, and Tails could see a glint of metal wobbling back and forth. The musical tones sounded almost frantic, and his eyes widened. "I think she's trapped, and that geyser's about to blow."

"No time for pleasantries, then." Gawain announced, and launched over the railing. "I am coming, little one!"

"Sir!" One of the guards barked, "Get back up here now!"

"Be careful, Gawain!" Percival called.

Tails and Percival leaned over the railing, watching the echidna dodge plumes of steam and bubbling mud as he approached the geyser in question. The singing was getting louder and higher-pitched, almost like a scream. They saw Gawain reach the geyser and then remove his shirt, wrapping it around the metal and then rushing back. He'd said she could handle the heat, but that didn't mean she wouldn't get hot herself in this place-

"Gawain!" Tails yelped as the geyser then blasted out of the ground. Steam plumed up and out, obscuring the knight from view. Everyone was watching, searching for what most of them assumed was a rogue tourist.

" *There* !" A kitten announced, and Tails and Percival gave sighs of relief as they saw him emerge from the clouds and then jump back up onto the platform, Lavatein tucked under one arm.

"Sir, that was completely irresponsible and dangerous!" The guard from before scolded, but Gawain barely seemed to care. He carefully held the blade, which Tails could see was actually *trembling* , in his arms before passing her off to her knight.

"There you are, little one. You are safe now..." He panted.

Percival held the sword close to her, "Thank you, Gawain... Oh goodness, you're *hurt* ."

Tails noticed Gawain holding his left shoulder, but the echidna gave only a slightly-pained smile. "Minor burns, they will heal. I believe that her safety is to be grateful for."

Tails smiled, "You're a pretty amazing knight, Gawain... Now to find Galatine and get you three-"

He paused as he heard a low, droning roar coming from above, and he looked up and out towards the horizon. Just within range was a flying shape, emblazoned with a bright red symbol on the side as it approached through the cloudy skies.

"What is this?" Percival asked.

Tails' brows furrowed, his hands curling into fists as he stood up. "...

Eggman ."

Percival stood up, cradling Lavatein. "No, we mustn't allow him to retake us or Lavatein."

"Agreed." Tails looked in the opposite direction. "Head for the visitor's center. We'll hide out in there until he passes while I get a message through to Sonic. Though knowing him, he's already on his way to intercept..."

Sonic *had* heard the rumbling of the approaching airship, but the tangled, twisted paths of the forest made it hard to navigate to where he could see it clearly.

"Of course he shows up *now* . Of course he shows up while I'm busy in an enchanted wood that I have to carefully navigate."

Shadow and Lancelot were closely following, Arondight firmly sheathed at the knight's side and Secace to Shadow's. Shadow seemed to be having some trouble getting used to running with something strapped to his leg, but *Lancelot's* disposition had shifted since he'd reunited with his blade. He looked more confident, more whole.

A knight was just not the *same* without his blade.

"Now that I am not unguarded by my sudden arrival here, I will be better prepared to face him." Lancelot announced, "It was quite jarring to awake in a place of metal and not stone."

"Hmph." Shadow muttered, "He is doing a poor job at summoning Excalibur at this point..."

"It's only been what, forty-eight hours?" Sonic sighed, "We're almost to the edge of the woods, right?"

"Seeing as we've passed that giant trap more than once, I'm gonna say no."

"Ugh!" Sonic stopped, "Why didn't you say something *before* !?"

"You two *know* these woods, don't you...?"

Lancelot sighed, "You truly *are* bitter about something, aren't you? I know your bitterness for me is that I resemble you and you feel threatened by that, but surely there is more to your qualms against the

king than simply being irritated by his recklessness and whimsy?"

"Oh, so you notice that too, huh? Couldn't have guessed."

Arondight chirped, but Lancelot quieted him with a hand to his hilt. "... *Of course* I am aware of the king's behavior. More often than not, I would wish he would take his position more seriously, but at the end of the day, he is my king, and his ambition is to help others. If not, then he would not have spent an entire *year* helping me and my fellow knights stabilize the situation in Camelot following the False Arthur's defeat in order that the kingdom would fall softly and not in bloodshed."

Shadow's scowl lightened a bit, looking at Sonic. "You... Stayed with them a *year* ?"

"You never noticed my growth spurt?"
Sonic crossed his arms, "Yes. After defeating the false king and Merlina, I could have come home and left the knights to pick up the pieces, but I didn't. I chose to help because the people were scared and needed comfort... Because you were right, I didn't stick around much after saving the world... I'm trying to be *better* at that."

He then straightened his stance, "But we don't have time for that, we need to find a way out of here."
He paused as he heard his comm buzz, and then pulled it out. "Tails?"

Sonic! Glad you answered. It's Eggman, he's-

"I know, Tails. We're trying to find our way out of these woods to go after him, but we're uh... The woods have changed since Lance and I were last here."

They then heard a soft singing tone from behind the fox, and Arondight chirped back.

"Hey, you found Lavatein!" Sonic cheered.

We did! The three of us are hiding out in the visitor's center at the moment, but she says to have Arondight lead the way. He'd know how he came in.

"Not a bad idea..." Shadow looked as his lookalike pulled his blade out and he hovered in front of them. "Lead the way, you over-sized butter knife."

Arondight chirped at Shadow, and then moved ahead of them.

"Hey, watch the language, Arondight.” Sonic scolded, and then looked back to his communicator. “Keep us updated on Eggman, Tails. We'll be out there and on the way soon."

Roger!

"Who is this *'Roger'* he spoke of?" Lancelot asked, and Shadow rolled his eyes.

"Let's just go-"

They all froze as the ground suddenly began to tremble under their feet, and Arondight fled back to Lancelot's side as swirling black smoke appeared.

"What's going on?" Shadow asked.

Sonic's eyes widened, and then his brows furrowed, as the smoke then formed into several dark suits of armor, glowing eyes appearing within their helmets.

"...Alright, who stepped on a cursed amulet and summoned knights of the Underworld…!?"

Shadow didn't know what these things were, but Sonic and Lancelot sure did. The way that Lancelot pulled out his blade and Sonic seemed to reach for his own- only to be disappointed when he found it missing- they were old foes for the pair.

"These creatures continue to plague the realm even *now* ?" Lancelot hissed, his eyes moving from armored shapes to creatures that seemed to resemble fish but levitating under their own power.

Sonic's hands curled into fists, "Never seen them here until now... But then again, I've never seen *you* here until now *either* ."

"Do you believe that our presence and theirs are connected?"

Sonic's ears flattened as they heard the all too familiar cackle coming from a loud-speaker overhead. Even Lancelot's expression soured at the sound. "... *No doubt* ."

Impressive, aren't they? Just imagine what *more* I can do with these artifacts in my grasp!

"You got *some nerve,* Eggman!" Sonic shouted, "But you underestimate my ability to *adapt* !" He turned to Shadow, "May I borrow-"

Shadow handed him his blade, "Knock yourself out."

Sonic took Secace and felt the weight and grip in his hands and adjusted for it, and then bent down into a slight crouch as more of these creatures began to appear on the edges of the trees. "...Thank goodness it's just the grunts and there’s no villagers around. These guys go down easier... Let's make this quick! Aim for the breaks in their armor and mind their blades!"

That was all Shadow needed to hear before he spin-dashed into action. The first went down easily, the hedgehog's force hitting it square in the chest and knocking it backwards. The body seemed to dissipate into a dark smoke while still airborne, so that as Shadow uncurled and landed on the ground, the pieces of armor scattered across the soil, remaining another moment before disappearing as well.

The next went down almost as easily despite being a good twice the previous knight’s size. Sonic was right, these grunts *were* easy to take

down-

The third one was apparently ready for him, and Shadow grunted as he slammed into the firm wall of a shield and then was knocked backwards. He uncurled and steadied himself, brows furrowing at the dark soldier with a massive blade in one hand and the sheet of metal in the other, glowing eyes staring back at him from within the helmet-

-It then poofed out of existence as Lancelot snapped and a chaos spear shot through its armor, crumbling it to the ground.

"Keep your wits about you, Shadow!" Lancelot informed as he twisted around and chopped another's legs clean off with Arondight. "This is no place to get prideful!"

"Good advice, Lance!"
Sonic spin-dashed with his blade and sliced through two knights with one stroke. "Maybe he'll take it better from *you* ."

Shadow scowled, getting back up and his fists igniting with crackling green that began to crawl up his arms. "We don't have time for this. I am the ultimate... I will finish this right now!"

"Shadow wait-"

Sonic's voice was drowned out by the roar of the chaos energy in Shadow's ears, the power surging through his veins as it spread out from him. " *CHAOS BLAST* !"

The energy shot out in all directions, striking every dark soldier and everything else surrounding. Tree branches snapped back, bushes flattened, and the pieces of dark armor flung in all directions and then fell to the floor.

The sudden outburst had taken some out of him, but Shadow seemed pleased with his work. Their adversaries were gone, their distraction removed.

" *Lancelot* !"
Sonic's panicked tone and Arondight's frantic chirping caught his attention, and he turned behind him to see his lookalike on the ground, Sonic and the knight's blade hovering over him. The green energy was creeping over his body as he twitched, and then Sonic gave him the sternest of looks.

Lancelot finally began to stir, moaning softly and rolling over onto his

back. "...Ugh...!"

"Lancelot, are you-"

"I-I... I am alright...!" Lancelot hissed, trying to sit up.

Arondight then turned towards Shadow, and the hedgehog took a step back as the blade rushed towards him, chirping and chirping rapidly and sharply. Shadow had no idea what the sword was saying, but it was obviously quite angry with him.

"Aron, Aron-" Sonic soothed, making a motion with his hand that quieted the blade. "That's enough. Yelling isn't going to help."

Shadow crossed his arms, "I ended our fight, is that not enough for you?"

Sonic looked up as the trees creaked and moaned on their own, branches pulling themselves back into place and ferns uncurling their fronds from defensive coils. "...I was trying to tell you not to put so much into one burst... You hurt *more* than just the dark knights, you know..."

Lancelot winced as he got up, Sonic holding his arm to keep him upright. "Ergh... I have never felt such an uncontrolled burst of energy...!"

" *Uncontrolled* ? I-"

"Chaos energy is influenced by your emotional state as much as it is everything *else* you do... You're hurting on the inside. Wounded... And it shows." Lancelot stood up onto his feet once more, standing straight despite clearly being in pain. "...Jagged edges like shattered glass... I could teach you-"

"I don't need teaching! I-"
Shadow's voice trailed off, tightening his crossed arms. He didn't *want* help, he didn't want anyone to pity him.

"Shadow... Training doesn't mean you're *weak* ."

"I am supposed to be the ultimate, the best there ever was, is and *will be* . I don't need help, I can handle everything on my own."

"You lost much, I can tell. But that does not mean that your title is all you have to be..."

Lancelot looked to Arondight, "Now... You were showing us the way out, Arondight."

Arondight chirped again, and then started off into the trees, which bent out of the way. Sonic and Lancelot followed, and after a moment, Shadow did as well. As Shadow passed one tree, he had to duck as one of the branches snapped back towards him as if to smack him upside the head.

Great. Even the *trees* were upset with him.

"Eggman sent those things to keep us stalled." Sonic murmured, "To keep *me* stalled... What's he up to?"

Sonic, can you hear me!?

"Silver! Nice of you to join the chat. What's going on?"

You'd better get to town right now! I just got word from the Minkoffs, and I think I know where Eggman's headed...

"Where?"

Venice just got a note from one of his associates that they're transporting a sword they found to the Londoon History Museum. Based on the description, I don't want to risk *not* getting there *first* .

Sonic's eyes widened, and he looked to Arondight as they chirped. "Pick up the pace, Arondight! We can keep up!"
He shot ahead and both Shadow and Lancelot also picked up the pace, hearing him murmur softly and slightly panicked under his breath.

"Is Sonic's sword really that much more important?" Shadow asked.

Lancelot nodded, "...It is when it's *Excalibur* ."

Shadow huffed, "Of course it is...!"

Sonic didn't get this tight feeling in his chest very often, this squeezing that forced him to have to think about breathing as he dashed through the trees and could make out the edges of the Tangled Gardens.

It wasn't often, but he hated it just the same.

Silver could be wrong, it might not be Caliburn that was at risk, but he agreed with the pale gray hedgehog- they couldn't risk Eggman getting his hands on any more Camelotian artifacts. If he had some tome that could summon the knights of the underworld, they needed to retrieve *that* from him *too* .

The trio blasted out of the trees and into the open air surrounding the woods, and Arondight pulled back to reunite with Lancelot before all three of them picked up speed to head for the city. The airship was well ahead of them and looked to be following the exact path they'd been worrying about.

They had to get there first.

"What purpose would the heathen have with the sacred sword Caliburn?" Lancelot asked, "Only the *true* king can wield his true power."

"There's that old prophecy looming around," Shadow murmured, " *'Whosoever pulleth this sword from stone is likewise king.'* My guess is he thinks that everyone will take his takeover seriously if he has Excalibur in his possession."

"We're not letting him find out." Sonic remarked, and the two dark hedgehogs nodded in agreement. *Hang in there, Cal... We're coming.*

Sonic could still remember the last time he'd seen the sword, just before he returned to the present...

The evening was cool, the air beginning to chill with the incoming mist. Though the stars twinkled above their heads, the lake gave off light of its own, shining against their fur and twinkling in their eyes.

"The time has come, Sir Sonic, Knight of the Wind, Chosen One of Caliburn..."

Sonic looked to Nimue, smiling despite feeling something else tugging at his chest. He'd grown accustomed to her voice, the maternal notes, but it was still Amy's voice... He hadn't heard Amy say his name in so long, felt her arms wrap tightly around him as she greeted him. He hadn't realized how much he missed her hug attacks until several weeks into this adventure... This mission he'd taken upon himself.

He looked to Sir Lancelot, the knight who'd been closest to the false king,

and had taken upon himself to prove himself as Sonic's best as well. A nobility and honor in his stance, even a softness perhaps- but sometimes, all Sonic could see was Shadow, the friend that refused to admit he was one. Lancelot had kept the same kind of distance between them, though for other reasons.

Sir Gawain to Lancelot's right, proud but braver than any other person Sonic had met... Excluding Knuckles. The only two echidnas he had ever met- excluding Tikal, he supposed- and yet they somehow were so alike that Sonic had caught himself trying to goad the knight into a good sparring match for the fun of it. Gawain might have, if not for his oath to act as Sonic's servant. It may look poor to the public eye if he were to wound Sonic, even if by accident.

To Lancelot's left, Sir Percival. Gosh, she reminded Sonic of Blaze more than anyone else he'd engaged with thus far. The same noble, formal, kinda aloof personality, as well as a fierce dedication to her station. If there was anyone here that he'd found himself calling the wrong name the most, it was her. Presently, she was looking back to him, trying to look calm and collected, but he knew she was saddened by this.

He was leaving. After a year of living in Camelot- learning their ways, leading their efforts to build back their lives following the Dark Queen Crisis- The chosen heir to the throne, their king, was leaving them.

A few of the other knights he'd met- Sir Galahad, Sir Lamorak- were still out performing their duties, protecting the people. They had already wished the hedgehog farewell, but it was not permissible for all of them to step away from their duty at once...

"You will be deeply missed, my king..." Lancelot hummed, giving a bow to him. "But you have served alongside us as a fellow knight, and served our people more than we could possibly repay."

"It is indeed a somber occasion," Percival replied, "But we mustn't be saddened. After all, you are returning to your home, the life you were pulled from unwillingly by the magician Merlina."

That was true, but it still stung. Sonic hadn't *come here by choice- he hadn't even arrived in any honorable way, instead falling from the sky and face-planting into the stony trail like a bird struck by an arrow. He hadn't come by choice, but he had taken it in stride as he always did. There was a world in danger, and it needed help.*

"Thank you for everything you all have done," Sonic replied with a returned smile, "You three were willing to take me in and teach me the

ways of Camelot-"

"Ahem!"

Sonic looked down to the the other figure standing beside Nimue, the tip of his blade slightly sinking in the mossy soil surrounding the lake. "...You four. My apologies, Caliburn."

The blade gave his student and wielder a slight glare, but the smile on his face did not wane. "Forgiven, I suppose... Knave."

Sonic bent down, eye to eye with the blade. "...I would take you with me, but the world I come from doesn't exactly rely on blades as much as Camelot does. I'm afraid you would be terribly bored sitting on my shelf collecting dust."

"Well, I should hope that you would not abandon me to some relic locked in a royal treasury!"
Caliburn looked out over the lake, "No... No, I will remain here... I have a feeling my wisdom and skill will be needed again someday... Some new knight will need my training... And when the time comes... I will be here for them."

Sonic smiled, putting a hand tightly around Caliburn's hilt. "...I would hug you, but I'd rather not lose my arms."

"Hmph... Farewell, Sonic... Perhaps one day we will see one another again..."

"Yes... Perhaps..."

Sonic stood up once again, and then walked to Nimue, who offered her hand. "...You promise this isn't going to backfire?"

The spirit of the lake grinned, "Come now, you do not trust me after this long?"

Sonic eyed the boat she was guiding him towards, "Trust in you is not the problem... You know by now my hesitance towards deep water."

"It shall never even touch you..."
Nimue helped him into the boat, and then had him lie down on his back along the bottom. He stared up at her, giving her a nervous smile. "...Now... Close your eyes... and when they shall open... You will have passed through to the other side, my king..."

"Have a pleasant voyage onto your previous life, Sonic." Caliburn spoke.

Sonic closed his eyes, but not before giving one last look to the blade peering down at him from the dock. "Farewell, Caliburn..."

He felt the boat begin to float away from the dock, the waves bobbing him up and down slowly and the mist seeming to cling to his fur like a blanket that wrapped him in slumber. The last thing he heard was Caliburn's voice, whispering in his ear.

"...When the time comes...We will see each other again..."

Museum Melee

When they reached the city limits, Eggman's airship was well ahead of them, and as they tried to outrun it, there was no denying it- it was headed straight for the museum, and not only that, but they had *company* .

Air raid sirens were blaring, sending civilians rushing to their homes and businesses for cover as robots came raining down from the heavens and marching into the streets. From what Sonic remembered, Londoon hadn't been particularly prone to Eggman attacks- considering he'd never been here to stop him before- but the sirens and the way the people fled suggested that they had grown up used to something *else* ...

The important thing was that the civilians were getting to safety and out of the way of danger. That would help immensely. Unfortunately, their delay in the woods had given Eggman the upper hand, and by the time they reached the museum, they were short on time before they'd get swarmed.

"Took you long enough." Silver informed as he met them at the door, "We've evacuated the civilians, but there's still staff and crew that are trying to secure the more... *Volatile* exhibits." He then looked behind them, "Hmm?"

Sonic looked back as well, as Tails, Percival, and Gawain all appeared from behind, Percival gripping Lavatein's hilt tightly.

"We will not hide when the people need us here." Percival informed, "Orders?"

Sonic looked back to Silver, "Did they get the sword inside? Maybe I can snag him and then lure Egghead away from here."

"I don't know. They said it arrived here, but I have no idea *where* in the building he's being stored until they can prove its authenticity."

" *I* could prove authenticity..." Sonic grumbled, "This the only way in?"

"No. There's a loading dock on the back side where they bring in larger cargo. We should start there, but we also need to *hurry* ."

The heroes hurried into the building, and Sonic tried not to get caught

up in the colorful banners and signs that dotted the entry and beyond. The museum was obviously participating in the festival they'd witnessed the night before, and as Silver led them through halls and down stairs, Sonic caught sight of some of the names of the exhibits. "Ancient Ancestors, Beginning of Civilization... What was that about the *Burning Raids* ?"

"Apparently several decades ago, the isle was plagued with a series of meteor showers that brought with them monsters." Silver informed, "They attacked towns and stole food before the locals formed a brigade that took care of them."

"Monsters from the sky attacking civilians," Sonic rubbed his chin, "Why does that seem familiar?"

"Probably from some horror film you watched." Tails muttered, "I preferred to *skip* those movie nights."

"Eh, I usually fall asleep in the middle of them, so-"
Sonic shook his head, "Not the time."

Silver rushed them down a dark hall with locked doors peering into laboratories before going to one of the doors and pulling it open. "In here."

Sonic stepped into the room and his eyes were met with dozens, if not hundreds- of boxes and crates stacked all along the edges of the loading dock, with various symbols and dates branded onto them. "Oh brilliant. He could be *anywhere* in here!"

"Then we'd better start looking." Tails looked at the dates on the sides of the crates, "Check the most recent first."

"Good idea."
Sonic began to open the crates on top, digging through the straw for anything resembling a sword. "Come on, Cal... Where *are* you? He'd be *awake* , right?"

"Not if he has been wounded." Lancelot informed, Arondight's chirps coming through as he was calling for the missing blade as well.

Sonic's quills pricked in alarm, "I hope not...!"
He'd *seen* Caliburn hurt, he'd seen him *snapped in half!* It was something he'd sworn he'd *never* let happen if he could help it. He'd set about being as gentle and careful with Caliburn as he could when he was in Camelot, ensuring his blade was sharp and maintained to

ensure no rust, chips, or breakage ever happened again.

Caliburn might've been irritated by the constant checks, but Sonic believed he knew where it was coming from and appreciated the concern.

"Come on come on, come on...!" Sonic hissed under his breath as he opened another crate, but then he heard a metallic thud, and he looked to the loading bay doors as they were pried upward by hands. "We've got company!"

The present task of digging through crates was postponed as the heroes faced down several large robots that approached the interior, and a hovering robot that appeared to be a speaker of some kind as Eggman's voice came out of it.

You're resilient, I'll give you all that... But I believe you have something of mine.

"Can't imagine *what* ." Shadow murmured, fingers curling into fists. "Nothing in here's got your name on it."

Hmph. I see Sonic's wise-cracking is rubbing off on you.

"Quite the opposite." Sonic remarked, "I think his seriousness is rubbing off on *me* ...!"

Shadow gave Sonic a slightly confused look, but seemed to shake it off. Now wasn't the time.

Sonic looked to his knights, "They're just enchanted armor, really... Gawain, you got your fists. *Use them* ."

Gawain gave him a smile, "Finally... Some action worthy of my skills...!"

"...For Londoon!"

The loading bay had become a battlefield, knights and heroes engaging their mechanical adversaries with blades, fists and spindashes.

However, there was a problem, and it bothered Sonic very much. There wasn't much space to really *move* . The knights had more experience working in close quarters, but Sonic couldn't help but remember what Silver had said about the museum staff trying to store

away any volatile items. How many things like that were being stored here? They could try to pull the fight outside, but the entire doorway was either occupied by robots or pieces of them piling up as Sonic and Shadow smashed them, the knights slashed them, and Silver tried to throw them away.

Silver seemed to be having the same problem. Sure, he had the power to throw the approaching horde into orbit, but he was trying not to damage their surroundings or anyone else. There wasn't anywhere for the others to get out of the way if he just decided to chuck them away with his powers.

Then Sonic saw Lancelot fail to dodge one of the robot's blasts, the resounding energy knocking him backwards and slamming him into one of the crates and busting open the side. "Lancelot!"

Then something big and heavy fell out of the crate, barely missing the dazed knight as it hit the ground with a low thud- A large chunk of stone, and a blade deeply embedded in it. Sonic couldn't get a close look, but he felt the energy humming from him... They'd found Caliburn. Now if he could just-

Lancelot groaned as he started to get up from the ground, and then gasped as the robot grabbed him tightly and lifted him up off of the ground. "Ergh! *Unhand me* !"

Uh uh uh! Eggman cackled as the heroes moved forward, and the cannon comprising the robot's other arm aimed at Lancelot's head while a massive leg blocked them from the stone where Caliburn rested. The knight struggled, but paused as the heat of the cannon began to blow against his face. **Don't take another step, you blue pincushion! *Shadow* might survive a blast point-blank, but *this one*...?**

"Fall back...!" Sonic hissed.

Lancelot's grip was still on Arondight, but no matter how sharp Arondight may be, his knight had no means of moving him to make an effective swipe at the mechanical menace. Lancelot's teeth clenched, his eyes shutting as the cannon and its heat moved closer to his cheek.

That's a good little rodent...! Honestly, I'm *curious* . What would happen to Shadow if I offed this one right now...?

Shadow's brows furrowed, "What do you *mean* by that?"

When I first saw him, I was indeed taken aback by how much you two resemble each other, even more than you and *Sonic* do! But after looking at my grandfather's notes on *where* he got genetic material from... It all makes sense.

Shadow's eyes widened, looking at his lookalike and Sonic could tell he was thinking of the same thing Arondight had asked back in the cave.

'And who are you? The son of my wielder?'

"He would've had to get hedgehog DNA from *somewhere* ...!" Silver whispered, "Why not the remains of a warrior of legend...?"

Sonic shook his head, and then looked back to the robot with the speaker. "Eggman!" Sonic shouted, "What's this about? What are you up to with the knights?"

Oh come now, you don't really think I would drag three more heroes to the fold *on purpose* , did you? Eggman complained, **It was never my intention to bring them here. I used that enchanted tome to try and summon the greatest weapon known to history! With the mighty Excalibur in my hand, nobody will question my rule over this world!**

" *Called it.* " Shadow muttered.

And wouldn't you know it-
Lancelot yelped as the robot tightened its grip, his armor creaking as it tried not to buckle under the pressure. **-This one found it for me quite *easily* ...**

"He is not yours to wield!" Percival argued, "Excalibur is the blade serving the one true king Arthur!"

Gep gep gep. Who cares about the details? Besides, it's not like he's here to get upset about it!

Sonic stood up straight, " *Isn't he,* Eggman...? Why do you think the knights came to *me* for help? What told them that *I* was someone who could help them if not for the fact that they knew me from somewhere...!?"

"Indeed!" Gawain announced, "The true king and Excalibur's true wielder stands before you!"

There was a grumbling, muffled by the man obviously pulling away from the mic, but Sonic could tell what he'd said... *'Of course he is...!'*

The knight of the lake began to struggle again as the man seemed distracted, "Kuh...Chaos- *Aaaaaaaaugh* !"
Lancelot then cried out as a shock shot through him- only made worse by his metal armor- and they heard even *Arondight* wail.

"Lancelot!" Sonic worried as the knight slumped over with a whine, twitching a bit in the robot's grip.

Thank you for the gifts, *King Sonic!* So *generous* !

Sonic growled and prepared to spin-dash that flying speaker out of the sky, but then picked up a whistle in the air and gasped as he saw a large missile headed for the building from above.
" *EVERYONE GET DOWN* !"

He grabbed hold of Tails, knocking the fox to the floor and putting himself over him. He barely heard a warbling sound before the explosion drowned it out. The floor under them rattled, crates shifting and clattering their contents to the ground all around them, the entire building shaking...

...after a moment, Sonic opened his eyes, the shaking easing up and the dust settling. Tails was curled up in a defensive position under him, but was slowly unfurling and appeared unharmed other than having to cough dust out of his lungs.

He looked to his right and saw Gawain getting up from doing the same for Percival, the two knights dusting themselves off. Shadow was also getting up, and as the ringing in his ears faded, the warbling came back.

Sonic looked up at the hole in the ceiling to see a familiar blue energy fading out, and in the center of the room was Silver, his hands raised to the sky but his body trembling as his telekinesis disabled. "Nice... Nice block, Silver..." he panted.

Silver's arms dropped to his sides, his eyes turning to Sonic for a look before rolling back as he started to collapse.

"I got you!" Shadow caught the younger hedgehog before his head could hit the concrete floor, "Easy..."

"Thank...Thanks..." Silver whispered, wincing as he tried to bring a

hand to his head. "Ugh... my head...!"

"You saved us." Gawain put a hand to Silver's shoulder.

"Not all of us." Shadow glared as the airship began to pull away, and Lancelot, Arondight, and Caliburn were nowhere to be seen.

Tails sat up, shaking the dust from his head and body. "We need to... to help evacuate the museum. Who knows how much of its structure was damaged in that blast...?"

"Meanwhile, the doctor is getting away with Caliburn, Arondight, *and Lancelot* ." Shadow growled.

Gawain looked to Sonic, "What would you have us do, my king?"

Sonic glared up at the hole in the ceiling, and then nodded. "Caliburn and Lancelot *both* would have my hide if they found out I prioritized them over the people. They can hold out, we need to make sure the civilians are safe and out of the building. Split up and help everyone get to the emergency exits!"

"At once, your highness!"

Rescue

"Rrrraaaugh!"
Sonic punched the blanket on the bed, pausing as he felt Tails' concerned gaze on his back. "...Sorry, Tails..."

The hedgehog hadn't been in a good mood ever since Eggman had gotten away, but he'd tried to hide it from the civilians as they aided those trapped out of the museum. The damage was significant in places, but fixable, and Shadow had helped Silver home while the rest of them returned to the Minkoff's home to regroup and come up with a plan.

Tails tried to give his brother a comforting smile, "We'll get them back, Sonic. I promise."

"I know, I just... Ugh!"
Sonic plopped back onto the bed, covering his face with his hands. "Ever since I learned Camelot was in the past, I've been losing my mind over all of the possible things that could have happened to Caliburn. Everyone else was brought here from the past here to present day, but Cal? He's been living through everything! It's been hundreds of years, Tails! Hundreds of years since I abandoned Camelot to come back here and left them all to watch their world fall apart around them, I-"

"Sonic..."
The hedgehog looked up as Mandolin, Gawain, and Percival all stood in the doorway. "...You mustn't feel guilty over what transpired in Camelot. It was not your fault."

Sonic's ears drooped, "...It *is* my fault. All three of you know that. *I* am the reason Camelot fell."

"You are not." Gawain bent down, "Merlina's words ring true. Camelot was doomed to fall. For you to have stayed would only have robbed you of your youth and the life you were forced to leave behind when you were summoned. You would have given up everything you knew, your whole life, only to *delay* an inevitable reality, rather than stopping it altogether."

"And let us not forget what you *did* sacrifice." Percival informed, "Following the fall of the illusion and Merlina's defeat, you remained with us for a year's time to help us stabilize the land. The kingdom

would die, but it would not be one of blood and terror, but a peaceful tragedy, thanks to your efforts."

"A *year* ...?"
Tails looked to Sonic, who gave the fox a sad smile. "...No wonder you came back a little different."

The hedgehog smiled a little bit, accepting another hug from his brother. "I couldn't leave when it was all a mess... I've done that too many times before... I was a mess when I came back..."

Tails nodded slowly, "I remember... But you'd been through a lot. I didn't try to press questions because I got the feeling you needed time to readjust to things..."

Sonic sighed, "I don't like being put in charge of other people, Tails... Not because I'm not good at it, but... I hate the feeling I get when I think about how much danger they could get into being near me." He gave the fox a light smile, "You've been with me for years and I still worry about you, buddy..."

Tails sat down beside him, "Danger's part of the job description... Maybe one of these days, Eggman will retire and we can all figure out something boring to do with our lives."

Sonic smiled wider, "Oh man... Eggman retiring? I'll believe that when Shadow admits I'm better than him-"

"That's not gonna happen."
They looked up as Shadow appeared behind them, "You done feeling sorry for yourself, Faker? We got some swords and a knight to rescue."

Sonic nodded, standing up and dusting himself off. "Right... No time for pity, we have a job to do."

"Not to mention we still don't know where Galatine is." Tails murmured.

"Not to worry. We found out where Galatine's hiding, but they'll be safe where they are for now."

"You're sure?"

Sonic gave his little brother a wink, "Trust me, only one knucklehead would be able to find it."

"...Ah. Good."

Sonic then looked back to Shadow, "How's Silver?"

"He'll recover, but he's out of the fight for now." The hedgehog overlooked those present, "...All we've got is right here."

"That, and a tracker Silver was able to plant on Caliburn before the blast hit!" Venice hollered from down the hall, "That is if you heroes *want* that info. If you wanted to find out on your own, then forget what I said-"

"Hon." Mandolin muttered with a glare down the hall. "What do you say, Sonic...?"

Sonic's brows furrowed, "Let's go get our friends back..."

"Signal's coming in strong... Cloaking device is working... We're good to go."

Sonic nodded to Tails from where he could see him in the cockpit, also able to look out the front windshield as the GUN transport carefully approached the location of where Eggman had taken his hostages. It was still airborne, still on the move, so the trick would be to sneak up on him without being noticed.

"So do we have a plan, or is this going to be a traditional raid?" Gawain asked.

"Glad you asked!" Sonic did his best to sound cheery and optimistic, "I *do* have a plan. Tails will land the transport, and he and Percival will stay with it to ensure we have a safe way of escape. The rest of us will enter the flying fortress and free the others. If we can cripple the fortress on the way, then by all means."

"Just don't send it plummeting into the ocean until we've gotten everybody to safety, okay?" Tails hollered from the cockpit, "Talking to you two hedgehogs specifically. Nobody's in the mood for fishing today."

Sonic gave his brother an exaggerated gasp of shock while Shadow rolled his eyes. "Let's just get his over with..." Shadow grumbled.

Sonic knew Shadow would never admit to it, but he'd *also* been

shaken up during their encounter at the museum. Eggman had practically just told Shadow that his lookalike wasn't just a lookalike, but the two of them were genetically related. Shadow had a living relative out there- Sort of. Lancelot would die eventually, but for now...

Sonic couldn't talk to him about it. It wasn't a good time. But he wanted to. Oh, how he *wanted* to. While Shadow had given Gawain Secace to borrow in case they ran into trouble, he'd kept the sheath strapped to his waist. It wasn't for Arondight, he'd insisted that he knew that Arondight's blade didn't match the shape of the sheath, so then...

"So our foe will not see us coming?" Percival asked, interrupting Sonic's thoughts.

"Right." Tails remarked, "Or rather, his scanner will see another of his drones coming back to land so we can enter the hangar."

"And you're sure it'll work?" Sonic asked.

Tails smirked, "At least long enough to get you guys aboard. Eggman's not a *complete* idiot, after all."

Shadow grunted, "If he's busy trying to free Caliburn from the stone, then he might be too distracted even *if* the cloaking drops."

Sonic felt his quills rising again. He had a feeling the edginess and anxiety wouldn't fade until he knew Caliburn was safe, but every reminder that he *wasn't* safe tried to swirl his thoughts into a muddy mess. He'd felt this way when any of his friends were in danger, but this seemed... Somehow different. Caliburn wasn't just a friend, he was... Something more to the hedgehog. He hadn't admitted it, not even to the blade, but he was the closest thing Sonic had encountered to... To a fatherly figure during their time together. Maybe an uncle, but-

"Hold onto something, we're diving into landing position!"

Sonic snapped back into reality again, gripping the bar over his head as the engines hummed louder and the transport tilted downward just a hint. *We're not here, we're not here, we're not here...*

He couldn't help but grin as he saw the side of Eggman's ship open up, and no robots were being deployed to intercept them. "That's it, we're one of you guys..." He whispered.

"This almost feels dishonorable, sneaking into the enemy's fortress undetected." Percival whispered, "... *Almost* ."

"Don't worry, Percival. I'll give him a fair fight... Even if he didn't do the same for us."

The interior of the transport grew rapidly darker as the ship's hangar swallowed it and the light of the sun faded into dim, artificial light bearing down from the ceiling. Tails held it steady, before carefully landing on the floor.

The engines quieted, they all waited for alarms or robots to come pouring out of the crevices... Nothing.

"...Aaaaaaand we're good."
Tails got up and pulled the door open, "Now go, go! Percival and I will keep the hangar clear for you."

"Gotcha, Tails." Sonic patted the fox on the back and gave Percival a wink before hopping out onto the floor. Between the high altitude and the entire space being open and made of metal, the temperature change was drastic as he left the heated transport and into the hangar, but he only rubbed his arms before looking back as Shadow and Gawain hopped out behind him.

"This fortress is of incredible size, where do we begin our search for the prisoners?"

Sonic pointed ahead, "There's an elevator there that leads up to the main portion of the ship. If we can get up there without being detected, then we're one step closer to them."

Shadow nodded, "Three of us, three targets-"

"No." Sonic shook his head, "We are not splitting up. We stick together and find them one by one."

"Sonic, it'll be more efficient-"

"I don't care about *efficiency* ! I care about making sure nobody else gets hurt or trapped." Sonic started down the hall, "Now, if *you* were Eggman and needed to keep a chaos-infused knight from escaping or wreaking havoc on your ship, where would you lock him up?"

Shadow sighed, his ears folding back. "...I know where."

Sonic's eyes narrowed as he realized what Shadow meant. "...We know from experience that Eggman neither respects nor answers to the gods. But he'd better *pray* to one of them that we're *wrong* ..."

Suddenly It's Not The Sword I'm Worried About-

"Dang... For a fortress that should be armed to the teeth with security, it's awfully quiet around here..."
Sonic frowned as they peered out of the elevator, which hadn't been any problem reaching or ascending in. "...I don't like it."

"Me either." Shadow growled, his hands sparking with chaos energy. "...The doctor might have prepared an ambush of his own."

"We will not go down without a fight..." Gawain hissed from behind, gripping the hilt of *Secace* a little tighter. "...This world is one of many marvels, but the heart of a knight and protector is timeless."

"Agreed." Sonic led the way, ears swiveling for any sound. "...Okay, got any idea where to start looking from here, Shadow?"

Shadow pointed to the ceiling, "Those conduits are familiar, they're the same kind used on the Ark for the stasis capsules. If we follow them, we might be able to find Lancelot first. Add another fighter to the mix if things get hairy."

"Check capsules first... Right. You're the one with the spy experience, I'll let you lead."

Shadow looked to the hedgehog with confusion, "Why are you backing me up all of a sudden? You never listened to me before now."

Sonic shrugged, "Call it humility?"

"Humility? *You* ?" Shadow shook his head, "Come on. Move quickly, but quietly."

Sonic and Gawain nodded, and then the trio hurried down the corridor. Following the conduits and Shadow's direction, they made it a fair way before finally, they heard and felt the thud of metallic footsteps. "I'll handle them-"

Gawain was already moving. The knight dashed around the corner, and they heard chirps of surprise and then metal scraping against metal. Sonic and Shadow hurried around, and already found the robot's head sliced clean off of their heads- robots that outsized Gawain by at least two times.

"...I'll admit, I'm impressed." Shadow mumbled.

Sonic smirked, "They've got talent and dedication. Now what?"

"The conduits lead to here..."

Shadow led them up to a large door further down the hall, "Part of me wants to be disappointed in a second, because when I'm right-"
Shadow knocked the door in, giving a frown as he saw a familiar, glowing capsule in front of him. "...I hate when it's about stuff like *this* ."

" *No* ...! *No* , *no* !" Gawain rushed to the capsule, looking into it. Lancelot laid still and quiet beyond the crystal seal, arms and legs restrained by bolts and eyes closed. "No! ...We are too late. The heathen has *ended* him!"

"No, he hasn't." Sonic put a hand on the echidna's shoulder, preventing him from slamming a fist on the capsule in his grief. "He is not dead."

"You...Are certain?"

" *Yes* . He's just been placed under a powerful sleeping spell. Trust me, I've encountered it *before* ."

The echidna's eyes regained their light, relief washing over his face that his friend and brother in arms could be saved. "Can he be *awakened* ?"

"Yes."
Shadow overlooked the console, "Ugh... Too bad the fox stayed at the transport."

"Try the old passphrase."

Shadow gave him a glare, and then typed in the letters *M-A-R-I-A*.

Access Denied.

"Well, it was worth a shot."

"Release our ally from his chains, you disembodied spirit!" Gawain shouted to the voice, "You are lucky to already be without a body, or else I would-"

"Gawain, *please* ."

Shadow rubbed his chin, "... Let's try... *Legacy* ."

He tapped the letters quickly, and then gave a sigh of relief as the lid to the capsule hissed.

Access granted.

Shadow pulled the lid open and then snapped the bolts loose from the hedgehog's wrists, lifting him from the capsule and laying him down on the floor. "Lancelot... Come on, wake up."

After a few moments, the knight gave a gasp of air, before his breathing began to quicken to a more normal pace.

"Lance...?"

Lancelot's eyes fluttered open with a moan, and they began to search, but weren't focusing on them... or *anything* . "S-Sire...? I... I-I cannot see you, I-"

Gawain frowned as his head lowered, "The light has been taken from his eyes."

"Easy, easy." Sonic murmured as the knight realized what his fellow knight had said and began to panic, grasping Lancelot's arms to keep him from thrashing. "Easy... I'm sure it's only *temporary* ."

"Right." Shadow assured, "The doctor put a... *Deep sleep spell* over you. It might take some time for it to fully wear off, that's all."

"Shadow... What transpired in the museum-!"
Lancelot cut off as he fell into a coughing fit, and when he pulled his hand back from his mouth, they saw flecks of red. Even blind, he seemed to know what they were seeing.

Sonic saw Shadow stiffen, his eyes widening with what looked like fear and panic for just a moment before shaking it off and taking Lancelot's arm gently. "We'll discuss that later. Right now, we need to get you to safety and then to a doctor."

"A-Arondight... We must-"

"We'll *find* him, *and Caliburn* ." Shadow looked to Sonic, who nodded firmly. "Gawain-"

"Of course."
Gawain took his fellow knight and placed his arm over his shoulders,

"I will aid you, Lancelot."

"Get both of you back to the shuttle." Sonic ordered, and then jumped as the entire ship shuddered. "...We'll be close behind you."

Gawain nodded, and then the two knights headed back the way they'd came.

"Be careful...!" Lancelot warned, fighting off another fit of coughing.

"Always..." Sonic replied, and then looked to Shadow. "Let's go."
The pair rushed down the corridor, and Sonic waited until the others were out of earshot before speaking. "So now that you've had time to process-"

"Eggman may very well have forged that story as a way to get under my skin and keep me distracted back at the museum."

"But...?"

Shadow sighed, "...If it is *true* , then Lancelot being one of my genetic donors does *not* make him my father."

"But it *does* make him *family* . Wouldn't you like to know you have some somewhere?"

" *Had,* Sonic. Remember, he's from the *distant past* ."

"But you got a chance to *meet* him."

"Yes..." Shadow shuddered a bit, "...And now he's wounded and it's giving me reminders of someone *else* I cared about...!"

They turned a corner and then both vaulted into spin-dashes the moment they saw robots down the hall. They were smashed in moments, and then Sonic rushed to a window overlooking a room below. "I've got eyes on both of them!"

The room below was filled to the brim with robots- no doubt to keep Sonic at bay should he try to rescue his comrades. Eggman himself was in the center, overlooking a giant robot arm that was presently firmly wrapped around Caliburn's entire body, trying to rip him free of the large boulder he slumbered in. Arondight, on the other hand, was restrained in his own way- metal bands strapping him to the wall opposite them and a metal sheath keeping his blade from cutting himself loose. Even over the roar of the mechanical arm's straining, he

could hear the whistling rage of the Blade of the Lake.

"Arondight sounds *mad* ." Shadow mumbled.

"Oh, you don't wanna know what he's saying. And I thought *you* had a potty mouth."
Sonic glared down at the arm, "We gotta get down there. I *won't* let Caliburn snap in half again."

"You snapped him in half before?"

"It wasn't *me* ! It was- You know what? Forget it. We need to- *Gyah* !"

Sonic yelped as he was thrown backwards, skidding across the floor before catching his footing and glaring at the metal shape that had blasted into him. "Ergh... *Metal* ...! I should have *known* you'd be patrolling the halls...!"

The mechanical hedgehog's optics burned red as it crouched to attack, only for Shadow to leap up onto its back and grab its arms from behind. "Ergh! You're the only one who can free Caliburn. *I'll* handle Metal!"

Sonic nodded, rushing further down the hall in search of the door leading into the laboratory. Alarms began to blare, more robots appeared, and Sonic furrowed his brows.

This time, he wasn't leaving without Caliburn... This time, he was getting him back.

The museum was one thing, he had been worried about damaging the property and other relics, but here, dents in the walls and floor were expected and- in Sonic's opinion- *encouraged* . It didn't matter how many foes he faced, they would not stand in his way.

He spindashed through one, ricocheting off of the collapsing body to strike another, then another. He dodged blasts and took pieces of broken robots and used them as spears to impale others as he went, until the last remaining robot was used to smash down the door leading into the main lab. "Eggman!"

Eggman turned, but only enough to glance at Sonic from out of the corner of his eye. "I should've known you'd find some way up here, you stubborn little prickle."

"Release Caliburn and Arondight. Now!"

"Hmm? Why? It's not like you'd be able to haul both of them out of here on your own. You're hardly armed for it."

"I bear no other blades nor sheath, but that doesn't matter. They're not property to be passed around like mere trinkets! Or have you just been ignoring Arondight's seething and foul language over there?"

"Hmph. Aren't you forgetting someone else...? Or are you going to let him disappear on you too?"

Sonic snarled- He rarely felt this angry, but it wasn't his fault Shadow had been lost for a while. After the ARK incident, he'd tried to catch him, to save him.

The observation window above caught their attention as it shattered, and then Metal Sonic skidded across the floor, its dismembered arms and legs following shortly after. Shadow stood in the hole in the wall, wiping off his hands before jumping down to the floor.

"Lancelot's already been taken care of..." Shadow hissed.

Now the man looked concerned. "Alright... Maybe we can work something out-"
Their attention then turned back the other way to the giant hand that had been trying to pull Caliburn as it popped and then the fingers blew off. "What the-"

Sonic gasped as the boulder began to glow, glyphs coming off of it, and then the floor beneath it began to change from metal sheets to stone blocks as tendrils crawled out from it, and they weren't stopping.

"Oh no..." Sonic started to back up, only for a tendril to touch his shoe. He gasped as his shoe turned to solid stone, but fortunately, it stopped at his shoe, not shifting his foot or any other part of him. It wasn't changing anything *alive* , but everything and anything else, and it was moving so *fast* ...

"Not good not good not good-"
He grabbed his communicator, trying to free his feet without cutting himself. "Tails! Tails, take off from the ship! *NOW* !"

A Captain May Go Down With His Ship, But a Knight-

"Miles!"

Tails looked up as Gawain appeared, Lancelot leaning against him and staring weakly and blankly forward. "Gawain, you have him!"

Their little trick seemed to have worked better than Tails had expected- though given the sounds and shuddering of the ship, he had a feeling their ruse was about to end. Alarms began to blare, lights flickering and the entire airship shaking like a snow globe in the hands of a child.

Percival had been prepared to defend the transport as she saw the echidna approaching, but she gave a sigh of relief as she recognized them, helping get the third knight onto the transport and noticing his blank gaze. "Lancelot, your eyes... What happened?"

"The heathen placed him under a sleep spell that's taken the light from his eyes, and he's coughing up blood."

Tails helped sit the hedgehog down, pulling a flashlight out of his bag and shining it in the hedgehog's eyes. "Can you see this, Lancelot?"

"Ergh... F- *Faintly* ..."

"Good. I think your eyes just need some time to rest and recover. You took a nasty shock back there, so just take it easy, okay? Where are Sonic and Shadow?"

Tails! Sonic's voice barked loudly through the comm link, **Take off from the ship! *Now!***

"But Sonic, you guys aren't-"

Trust me! Just take off and get some distance from it! Caliburn's turning everything not alive to *stone* in here!

Tails gasped and then rushed to the cockpit, "Hang on, guys!"

Gawain held Lancelot in one place as the ship's engine's whirred loudly and then they began to rise. Lancelot gripped his fellow knight's shoulder firmly, eyes tightly shut. "Th-The Doctor must have

tried to remove Caliburn from his stone sleep by force...!" He hissed, "The stone's enchantment is retaliating and forming a shield to defend him...!"

"What do we do then?" Percival asked.

"...M-Miles! How do you use your magic tablet to speak with Sonic?"

"Tap the circle in the top right corner and then Sonic's name!"

Gawain handed the tablet to the knight and pressed the buttons for him, and then after a moment. "The light is green...!"

"Then speak!"

Lancelot nodded. "Sonic, Shadow. The enchantment is trying to protect Caliburn from harm. You must calm it by removing him from the stone."

You read my mind, Lance...

"...But it's gonna take me a second."

Within the airship, it was utter chaos. Robots were fleeing the tendrils of stone crawling across the floor, the slower ones becoming frozen in place in mid-step. The only ones not freezing were those able to hover, but if they touched the walls or the top of the door frame, they froze to it, making the doorway smaller and smaller as the buzz-bombers began to pile up.

Sonic grunted as he tried to pull his feet free of their stone-shoe prisons, while Shadow was fighting off the remaining robots- his hover shoes keeping him from becoming trapped as well. Eggman had long since fled from the room, and the entire ship was now shaking and shuddering as no doubt the spell was reaching for the engines and energy core. Arondight's prison had also turned to stone, but it did nothing to help the frantic sword get loose from the wall. At least his own enchantment had kept him from petrifying as well.

"This whole place is going to come down into the ocean if we don't get him out of there...!" Sonic looked up at the top of the boulder, which had risen up high and out of his immediate reach like a growing stalagmite. Caliburn's eyes were closed and restful, he had no idea what was going on or what he was doing.

"We need to make this quick!" Shadow barked, and then grunted as he was knocked back by a buzz-bomber's laser. He caught himself on the wall...but then his glove froze to his hand. " *Damn* ...! Sonic-!"

"I know, I know!"
Sonic pulled off his own gloves, tossing them aside as he'd need to climb for his mentor now. He snapped the tongue of his shoes loose, giving his feet enough space to escape, and then hurried towards the pillar of stone. "Hold on, Caliburn! I'm- *WHOA* !"

The ship shuddered harshly, and then... everything went silent for just a moment, and then Sonic and Shadow's eyes widened as gravity seemed to take over. The engines had stalled. They were falling.

Sonic grabbed onto the pillar tightly as the ship tilted to the side, watching the blue of the sky change to the deep blue of the ocean below. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the GUN transport and one of Eggman's escape pods fly by- Eggman must've made it to safety- and then the entire ship slammed into the surf. The windows shattered, and Shadow gasped as water began to rush in.

"Sonic, hurry!" Shadow shouted, trying desperately to get his hand free from the wall.

Sonic gripped the stone and pulled himself up onto the pillar's side as the ship tilted further. "Oh for Chaos sake-"

Shadow gasped as the water reached his neck, taking in a deep breath as he disappeared under the surface.

"Shadow!"
Sonic crawled across the pillar and wrapped his arms around Caliburn's hilt. "With the words of my lips, I take on the title of king of Camelot to serve its people!" He spoke quickly, and then with relief, the blade slid out of the pillar with a flash of light. He gripped Caliburn tightly, and then searched the surface for the other hedgehog. "Shadow! Shadow!"

The surface was growing closer and closer as the water deepened, but he still didn't see the dark hedgehog. Should he jump in and go down to help? He *could* swim, but-

He gave a sigh of relief as Shadow finally surfaced, Arondight by his side. "Guh! You owe me *big time* , Faker!" Shadow gasped, "You're lucky the ship hitting the water knocked Arondight loose!"

"You can beat me up for it later!" Sonic held out his hand as the water level rose Shadow to his reach, "Just warp us *out of here* !"

Shadow took his hand, "Chaos Control!"

The two hedgehogs and two blades vanished from the water, and the next thing Sonic knew, he was crashing onto the floor of the transport, tumbling across the floor before his back hit one of the seats and brought him to a stop. He groaned, rolling over onto his stomach and pulling himself up onto his hands and knees and overlooking the others.

"Sonic!" Percival came to his side, helping him sit up while Gawain checked on Shadow as he coughed and wiped seawater from his face. "Are you alright?"

"We're... We're alright..." Sonic panted, looking to Shadow who gave a nod of agreement. "We're okay..."

He then turned as he felt the blade in his grip shift, and he saw Caliburn's eyes fluttering open. "Caliburn...?"

"Mmm... W-Where..."

Sonic pulled the blade up to stand upright, giving him a smile. "Hey. Remember me?"

Caliburn blinked, and then his brows furrowed. "Of course I remember you, Knave!" He scolded, "You think a sword such as myself would forget how much trouble you got me in!?"

"He *talks* ."
Shadow blinked, "I mean... Like... *Talks talks* ."

Sonic smiled wide, "Yup..."

"Sonic, what has happened? Where are we?"

"It's a very, very long story, Caliburn... Let's just say seeing you awake and safe has been a long time coming-"
Sonic looked as Lancelot began to cough again, Gawain and Shadow both holding him up as he wheezed and tried to get some deep breaths in. "Tails!"

"Yeah!?"

"Head back to shore. We need to get Lancelot to a doctor."

"Right!"

It was amazing how quickly Mandolin was able to get a doctor to their home when she mentioned who the patient was. Taking him to the hospital was deemed only a last resort- He'd suffered enough trauma in this time period, they didn't want to put him through that *too* if they could avoid it.

Sonic and Shadow sat close to the fireplace, drying themselves off and keeping warm after their unexpected swim. Sonic had lost his shoes and gloves to the petrification, and thus Lancelot lent him his civilian outfit to wear until they could purchase replacements.

Percival and Gawain sat off to the side as the paramedic overlooked their fellow knight, whose coughing had begun to ease as time went on. "How does he fare?" Percival asked softly.

The fox gave a smile as he paused in his examination, "He's going to be just fine. Give him some rest and he should be back on his feet." He pulled the light down he'd been checking Lancelot's eyes with and placed it into his bag. "As for his eyes, keep away from extremely bright lights for a bit and they should be back to normal as well."

That was a relief. "Not to worry," Sonic responded, "We plan to get them back home where Eggman can't get to them again."

"Well I should *hope so* !" The fox stood up, "Eggman's the last thing Camelot would need. What was he up to, anyway?"

"Another mad grab at world domination."
Sonic's shoulders slumped a bit, and then gave a subtle nod to Caliburn. The blade was hidden under the stairs with his fellow swords, all of them keeping quiet as to not freak out the paramedic. Caliburn's eyes seemed to glow a bit in the darkness, looking back at Sonic with the same acknowledging gaze.
Close inspection of his blade on the way back had yielded blunted edges- not surprising given his time in the stone- but also some worrying hints at rust, and enough grime that even after being soaked in the salty water of the ocean, his golden hilt and guard were closer to brown.

"Well, you just keep up the ‘stopping him’ part, and we'll be just fine..."

A few minutes passed, Mandolin thanking the paramedic for coming, the fox giving her some instructions on how to best help Lancelot recover, and then leaving the house.

The blades didn't move from their hiding place until they were certain the visitor was gone, and then Caliburn led the way as they emerged and returned to their knights' sides. "Well now... I believe I am owed some answers." Caliburn hummed, "Also, I can't help but notice that *Gawain* is present, but Galatine is *not* ."

"Working on that part... Long, long story short," Sonic murmured, "One of my adversaries wanted to use you to claim ownership of the entire world, and he accidentally brought Lancelot, Gawain, and Percival here instead of you. You were in slumber and when he found you, we tried to stop him, but we failed... and he took Arondight and Lancelot hostage as well as you."

"We pursued, and were able to rescue the three of you, but the fortress where you were being held came under the stone's enchantment and fell into the sea." Gawain finished, "Now that the immediate threat has been defeated, we can begin work on finding a way back, starting with retrieving Galatine from... Angel Island, was it?"

Sonic grinned, "Yup! Tails, Gawain and I will head out there tonight, while the rest of you remain here to make sure Eggman doesn't swing back. Not that I think he will... Oh, by the way, Cal? This is my little brother Tails, and Shadow, Lancelot's... Erm-"

"Descendant." Shadow replied, though looking a bit uncomfortable at the admission.

"...Descendant. Tails, Shadow, allow me to properly introduce Caliburn of Camelot... my mentor."

Caliburn tilted a bit to nod, and then looked to Tails as the fox bent down and examined his blade. "You greatly resemble the young blacksmith in the castle town, little one."

Tails smirked as he looked up to Sonic, "Man, you just ran into our counterparts *everywhere* , huh?"

"You have *no idea* , Buddy..."

Tails looked back to Caliburn, "Well, I do know some stuff in the blacksmithing department. How about we get you resharpened and cleaned? Can't imagine that salt water bath did you any favors."

Caliburn smiled back at the fox, "That sounds delightful..."

"Great!" Sonic announced, "You'll be all ready for anything we might run into when we head out tonight."

"Are you sure going to talk to Knuckles at night is the best idea, Sonic?" Tails asked as he took Caliburn's hilt carefully, "I mean, he's jumpy even in the daytime, and the island's flight path will actually be closer to Londoon by then."

"Yes, we'd best wait for morning." Gawain suggested, "I am as eager to find my blades as you, but we do not want to have your friend mistake us for thieves."

Sonic sighed, "Alright... We'll wait for morning."

Rest and Remember

That night was the first night since everything had happened that really felt relaxed. Caliburn and most of the missing blades were safe and back with their respective knights, they had a plan to collect the last in the morning, and chances were that Eggman wouldn't be interfering this time.

Shadow might've tried to rest, but it just wasn't his style to do so. Any moment, something could come up, some trouble he was more than qualified to handle while everyone else slept.

Lancelot, on the other hand, had been sleeping practically since the paramedic left. Resting on the cot by the fireplace, his hands folded over his chest, he looked a lot like he had in the capsule earlier in the day- though far more peaceful, and this time, he could wake up at any moment, rather than trapped in slumber and unable to rouse himself.

From what Percival had shared, the Knight of the Lake had gone through the most during their time here. Warping the three of them to safety, the events in the Tangled Gardens, his capture... He deserved the break he was getting.

Shadow's head had been spinning ever since the knight had been captured, though he'd never admit that to anyone, *especially* not *Sonic* . What Eggman had said, how Shadow had been made from part of Lancelot. If it was *true* , he had to wonder... Was it a quill? A tuft of fur?... A *bone* ?

The thought of the professor breaking into a tomb and taking part of someone's remains soured the hedgehog's mind. He'd always expected that the hedgehog DNA had come from a willing donor, someone had offered their blood for the sake of science, but to have taken part of someone's body without their consent? Someone who was here *now* , alive and well?

He rubbed his arms as if a chill had come into the room, closing his eyes tightly.

How old will Lancelot be when he passes? How much of him would still be left by the time the professor- presumably- found him and decided to make him part of his project? Sonic was right, Shadow might have *family* here before him, and all he could think about were the other repercussions... and how poorly he'd treated the knight

when they first met.

"Shadow..."
Shadow looked over once more, seeing Lancelot's eyes open. They stared back at the ultimate lifeform, something like sympathy in his gaze. He hated people feeling bad for him. "...You are distressed."

"I... Yes." Shadow scrubbed his face with his hands, "...This whole mission's been a lot to take in."

"Indeed... But it is more than *weariness* that ails you."

"Lancelot..." Shadow paused, "I...I wanted to... to... apologize. It was... Not right of me to treat you poorly because of how you resemble me... Sonic was right. I *do* take deep pride in who I am... *What* I am... To be compared to someone else, to be told I am just like someone else...I do not like feeling like I am not my own..."

He closed his eyes, but opened them as he felt Lancelot's hand brush his own.

"You have lost *much* , but one thing you retain is your individuality... We may *look* like one another, but that does not make you me, or I you. Neither is false, both are genuine."

Shadow nodded slowly, looking back towards Sonic as he chatted with Tails about something out of earshot. "...How do you *tolerate* him?"

"Believe me, when we first met, I did not. I hated him for sparing me, it is considered an insult to not allow a knight the privilege of falling in noble combat... But I came to learn that it is simply how Arthur is... He is my king, so no matter how I feel about his antics, he still remains my superior. During his time in Camelot, I saw his true self shine as he helped us stabilize the kingdom. It was hard, and the world he left behind still aches from that empty throne... but I know he is truly happy here, with those he loves most."

"With your kingdom falling into ruin... What will you do *now* ?"

"I hope to rest a bit upon returning, but not long..." He gave the younger hedgehog a smile, "As I am sure you know... We protective souls cannot be away from action and aiding others for long... And if anything between this world and mine is to be changed by this experience... I know that Sonic has allies that will stand by his side in times of trouble... and that I have someone I trust to keep him reined in."

Shadow smirked, "That's a tall order, Lancelot... But I'll try."

"Good..."
Lancelot relaxed again, looking up at the ceiling. "...I can only hope that Gawain and Arthur's quest tomorrow does not yield more trouble."

Shadow nodded, "Knowing the guardian, they might be in for a rough greeting... Rest. I will keep an eye on things tonight."

He wandered from the front room a bit, into one of the many halls, and then pulled out his communicator, typing a message quietly.
Rouge. When you have a second available, I have a favor to ask…

"Good morning Angel Island! It's gonna be a lovely morning, temperatures in with a high of sixty-five and a low of forty, clear skies and lots of sunshine-"

"Sonic, you know it never gets that cold on Angel Island."

"Stop interrupting my weather report, Tails."

"Glad to see you're still entertaining in your own way, Sonic..."

Sonic grinned as he heard Caliburn's voice chime from his hilt, strapped to the hedgehog's back as they approached the floating island. Chaos, it raised his spirits to hear it again. "You know it, Caliburn! Can't help but have a bit of fun."

"Which is a welcome change from the anxiety you expressed these passing days." Gawain remarked, "Worried deeply for Caliburn's safety."

"You worried for me?"

"Pssh... Yeah."
Sonic looked out the front window of the transport, seeing their destination coming into view amidst the early morning fog. "Here we come..."

"How does this landmass float in the air as it does?" Gawain asked.

"The magic of the gods, and I'm not even making that up." Tails remarked, "Wish there was a *science* to it... but *no* . Hold on, we're going to start our descent."

"Best to land in the clearing by Emerald Ruins, Tails. More open space and Knuckles should be right there."

"Right."

"And this guardian is a friend of yours?"

"Yeah! He lives here and keeps thieves from stealing precious artifacts and treasures hidden on the island. He's good at it too. If anyone would know where in all that green Galatine is hiding, it would be him."

"Sonic's got friends and allies all over the world at this point." Tails admitted, "We kinda have a network of people protecting the entire world. Though some of them can be trouble on their own."

"Yeah." Sonic stuck his tongue out at the open air, "Looking at you, Jettison Q. Hawkington the Third."

The massive tangle of green treetops and vines broke away as they approached, replaced by the opening fields surrounding the ruins where the Master Emerald stood. The powerful stone glowed brightly as they approached, lighting up the clearing in a bright green haze that outweighed even the approaching sunlight as dawn came upon them.

"Ruins of an ancient civilization..." Gawain hummed, "I would guess there is much history buried here."

"Oh, you have no idea... All ashore that's going ashore!"
Sonic pulled the door open and hopped out, looking around and feeling the soft grass under his feet. "Ahh... Nothing better than a quiet morning in the middle of nowhere... Hey, Knux!" He took off towards the central temple, Gawain following close behind. Dashing up the steps, he had full expectation to find the guardian and his friend in his usual place standing beside the Master Emerald, but instead, the stone remained alone. "...Knux?"

"Perhaps he has gone on patrol in the nearby woods." Gawain guessed.

"Yeah, maybe, but... It's not like him to leave quite this early . " He crossed his arms, "...Where is he...?"

Gawain seemed far more interested in the Master Emerald. "This stone... So intricate and gives off its own radiance..."

"Yes... It's the Master Emerald. It's task is to keep the smaller stones of power, the Chaos Emeralds, under control. If they grow too unstable or an evil spirit tries to use them for their own gain, the guardian can call upon the Master Emerald to calm them into a stable state again. It's also what keeps the island afloat. A few times it has been shattered when put under too much strain, and the island sank back to the surface until it was restored-"

"Sonic, watch out!" Caliburn shouted from behind.

Sonic jumped back as Gawain placed himself in front of him, just in time for the echidna knight to meet fist to fist with the echidna guardian who had launched up from the other side of the temple's summit. "Hah! Your ambush has *failed* , you..."
Gawain's triumphant cry faded out as his eyes met with that of his counterpart, "By the gods..."

Knuckles was just as startled, stepping back with wide eyes as Gawain lifted his visor so they could look each other over properly. " *What* ...!?"

"I know, cool huh?" Sonic greeted with a smile, "Knuckles, this is Sir Gawain, knight of Camelot. Gawain, this is Knuckles, the guardian and caretaker of Angel Island."

"You... You're an *echidna* ...!" Knuckles whispered softly, reaching out. *"...Another living echidna..."*

Gawain raised a brow, "You do not see our kind much?"

Knuckles shook his head, "I... I have been the only one here for as long as I can *remember* ."

Gawain was startled for a moment, and then settled into an expression of quiet disappointment, "I see... That is unfortunate. My ancestors' pilgrimage to Camelot means that I know very *little* of their culture."

"Wish I could help, but all *I* have are ruins and old murals myself." Knuckles looked at Sonic, and his memory must've snapped back to his initial thoughts. "Hold on. What are you *doing* here, Sonic? What is *he* doing here? Isn't Camelot, you know... *Gone?* "

"We're looking for Gawain's swords." Sonic replied, "They're enchanted with minds of their own, and all clues indicated that they came here to hide from Eggman when he dragged Gawain and his fellow knights here from Camelot."

"I have been informed that you are the most likely individual to help us find them." Gawain overlooked the clearing and trees beyond, "...The dense vegetation does propose a worthy hunt..."

"Oh, the jungle's only *part* of this place!" Knuckles announced, "But I have a feeling we're in a time crunch."

"Not as much as we were before."
Tails finally caught up with them, pushing a fern frond out of his face as he joined them. "Sonic and Shadow have knocked Eggman out of the sky for a little bit... Literally."

"You're welcome." Sonic announced, and then turned back to the guardian, "Now, first things first. Galatine can not only think on their own, but make vocalizations as well."

"Yes, Galatine are a bit of a *mischievous* pair. Have you encountered any unusual *humming* these passing days?"

Knuckles' eyes widened, "That's been your *swords* ? I thought I was losing my mind!" He motioned for them to follow, "It's been coming from the caves. Follow me."

"Hmm..." Caliburn hummed from Sonic's back, "It *would* make sense for Galatine to prefer caves-"

Knuckles paused, whipping around and searching the trees. "What was that!?"

"Oops." Sonic winced, "I forgot one more person..."
He pulled Caliburn from his scabbard and placed him on the ground, allowing him to see Knuckles and Knuckles him. "Knux, this is Caliburn. He's *my* partnered blade."

"...It has a *face* ."

"I prefer the term *'he,'* thank you." Caliburn informed with a glare, "But yes."

"Do *all of them* have faces?"

"Nope, just Caliburn."

"Wait a minute..." Knuckles stood up straight again, looking back to Sonic. "Wasn't Caliburn the name of the sword that chose who was next in line for the throne, or something like that?"

"You know your history well."

"But if he's your sword..."

"Uh huh..."

The echidna's expression deadpanned, and then he turned away as he shook his head. "Of course you are."

Sonic grinned as he placed Caliburn back into his scabbard, "Why does everyone keep *reacting* that way...?" He asked.

Tails shrugged with a smirk, " *Can't imagine.* I mean, it's not like you're *also* the savior of the planet, Light Gaia's companion, Destroyer of the Death Egg, Shield against the ARK, Sword against the mighty Chaos-"

"Okay, okay. Enough titles, Tails."

"It means if you ever retire, we'd be hosed." Knuckles muttered.

"If *Eggman* ever retired, I'd have nothing to do!"

"Oh, that's not true, Arthur." Gawain informed, "You had much to do in Camelot, and your adversary was not present there."

"Thank Chaos..." Sonic muttered.

"Tell me more about this ' *Eggman'* we encountered." Caliburn murmured, "I was not awake for much of your toils."

"He's a guy out to take over the whole world. Has been since I was little. My first encounter with him, I just kinda happened to be there and stopped him by letting all of his hostages go. After that, he kinda started to get obsessed with me. It's escalated to a point where I think he won't even *try* some method of takeover if he thinks I won't show up for it."
He held his hands out, "It has to be grandiose, dramatic, full of *passion* !"

"And usually a destructive first strike." Tails added.

Sonic's shoulders slumped, "Yeah... That *too* ."

"Honestly, I'm surprised he didn't just go around hollering your name and making dumb threats to try and lure you out while you were in Camelot. Nobody knew where you were that whole time."

"Was that when you called and asked if he was up here with me?" Knuckles asked, "You were stuck there a few weeks then."

"Closer to a *year* for me." Sonic marched forward, "And stuck is relative. I only came back when things were stable, and even then... I felt like I was letting them down."

"But you did not." Gawain assured, "We held and still hold no ill will against you for wishing to return home. Camelot was not your home, just as this time is not mine."

Sonic smiled, "I know, I know... We discussed it yesterday... Let's hurry up and find Galatine already so you all can go home."

Hide and Seek!

Splash! Splash! Splash!

The footsteps of the king, knight, and his friends echoed off of the cave's walls as they made their way into the darkness. Knuckles had led them deep into the jungle, following rivers and streams to a small waterfall with an entrance just large enough for them to duck inside the cave behind it without getting soaked.

"It's been coming from here..." He whispered, "...These tunnels go on for a bit, though."

Gawain nodded solemnly, peering into the darkness. "Galatine? Galatine, can you hear us?"

"It's safe now!" Sonic called out into the dark, "Eggman's been dealt with, you can come back out and go home!"

There was silence, and then a low, vibrating hum.

"...Oh come now, don't be like that." Gawain sighed, "We do not have *time* for games, Galatine."

"You understood that?" Knuckles asked.

"Only those chosen as the wielder of a sacred blade can distinguish the other blades' tongue." Caliburn explained, "As the one whose task is to choose the next ruler of Camelot, I am able to speak *all* languages."

"Right... So they don't want to come out?"

"They both chanted *'Hide and Seek!* '" Sonic remarked, "So... *No* . We have to find them."

"Great..." Knuckles marched onward, the others following. As it grew darker, Tails turned on the flashlight on his tablet, igniting the tunnel in light.

Gawain shook his head, "The tools of this time never cease to amaze me... Galatine, please don't be like this. We need to return to Camelot as soon as possible. The people need our aid!"

Another low hum.

Sonic tilted his head to try and look at Caliburn as he sat strapped on his back. "Don't suppose you could convince them to stop playing?"

"If I could not stop you from seeking out *'side-quests'* as you called them back in Camelot, what makes you believe that I can convince Galatine?"

"Hey, to be fair, that side-quest turned out to be another one of Nimue's tests, so by doing that, I passed."

"That was one instance out of *many* ."

"Remind me why I missed you?"

Tails chuckled, "They're leaving a trail, you know."

"Hmm?"
Sonic looked over at the screen, "They are?"

"While I was sharpening Caliburn last night, I decided to do a scan. All of the blades give off a similar energy pulse, and it leaves a trail as they move. Caliburn's is the strongest pulse, of course-"

"Naturally." Caliburn replied with pride.

"But I've got just enough of a trail from Galatine that they should be... This way."
He looked up as the tunnel split, pointing out to the left tunnel.

"Not bad, Buddy..." Sonic smirked, "We're getting *warmer* , you two!"

The following hum was a little higher in pitch.

"Well, at least *they're* having fun." Knuckles grumbled, "So tell me, Blue. What're Gawain and Galatine doing here, anyways?"

"Eggman." Tails groaned as Sonic did the same. "He summoned them, plus Sir Lancelot, Sir Percival, and their swords here trying to summon Caliburn, but since Caliburn was already here-"

"They got pulled here instead." Knuckles nodded, "So where are Lancelot and Percival?"

"Lancelot was wounded by our adversary, and needs some time to heal." Gawain informed, "Percival remained behind to look after him, alongside Shadow."

"You dragged Shadow into all of this?" Knuckles smirked, "How much stuff's been broken?"

"A lot, and I got punched in the nose once."

"What!?" Gawain rushed forward to face Sonic, "You did not tell us he attacked you!"

"It's fine. I let my tongue get away from me and I deserved it."

"It sounds justified to *me* ." Caliburn murmured.

The echidna knight frowned, but didn't speak any further on the matter.

"So how'd you know that Galatine came here to hide?"

"I spoke with Nimue, the Lady of the Lake and a spirit that has survived through the centuries from Camelot. She told me that they were here somewhere, but she couldn't tell exactly where because *'another spirit guards this place.'* "

"She probably meant Chaos." Tails hummed, looking to Caliburn as he and Gawain raised their brows. "Chaos is a powerful water spirit too, able to command the entire sea if he wanted to."

"Good heavens. I would hate to be on the side of his ire." Gawain remarked.

Knuckles sighed, "Yeah... You would..."

Sonic stepped forward, putting a hand on the echidna's shoulder. Knuckles gave him a reassuring smirk and then shook his hand off of him as he lifted a finger to his lips. No need to tell Gawain and Caliburn the whole tale, it obviously didn't affect them on Camelot.

"Right." Tails whispered directions as the tunnel split again, and then again. "Left... We're almost on them..."

As they broke out into a small cavern, Tails paused, and pointed towards a large boulder. *'There.'* He mouthed with a grin.

Sonic grinned back, "Hey, I've got a riddle... What's two swords that go by the same name and like to waste time playing silly games when they *should* be working...?"
He tiptoed over to the boulder, and then quickly peered around it. The humming was almost shrill in its pitch, and Sonic's grin widened as

the two swords popped out from behind the rock.

"Galatine!" Gawain called out, reaching his hands out to catch their hilts as they approached. "You are unharmed, but still in some trouble for pulling us all this way. You did far better at hiding than your companions did- excluding Caliburn, of course."

"Gotta hand it to ya, Cal." Sonic remarked, "Keeping yourself hidden for hundreds of years is impressive."

Caliburn probably would have crossed his arms if he'd had them. "Slumber prevents much movement or activity to lure in hunters, I suppose..."

Galatine rushed over, humming to the sacred blade and Sonic, swirling about them as Arondight had in the cave.

"Small world, isn't it?" Sonic teased, "Pretty and feisty girls..."

"So... Now what?" Tails asked, "Now that we have all of the swords back, how do we send them all back home?"

"That would be up to the Lady of the Lake." Caliburn assured, "If she could send Sonic back to his home, then she no doubt can return them to Camelot without error."

Sonic sighed, "I just hope that whatever Eggman used to bring them here went down with the ship into the ocean..."

"You would be referring to the tome I collected from his treasury while aiding Lancelot to the transport while you and Shadow rescued Caliburn and Arondight?" Gawain asked.

"Wait, you *did* !? When-? Where-? Why didn't you *say* something? Where is it *now* ?"

"It has been relinquished into the hands of the Minkoffs. Lancelot's health was more pressing at the time. Besides..." Gawain gave the hedgehog a light smile, "Even the king isn't privy to all of a knight's secrets."

Knuckles smirked, "I like this guy."

"Of course you do..." He looked at the time on Tails' tablet, "Eh... We didn't exactly give the others a time that we'd be back, so... I suppose the two of you could have some time to talk and get to know each

other."

Gawain hummed, "It *has* been some time since I last spoke with another of my kin..."

"Well then, why don't I tell you some of the island's history?"

As the pair led the way back out of the cave, Galatine following their knight and Sonic and Tails taking up the rear, the fox elbowed his brother. "Are you gonna invite Blaze to tea so she can meet Percival now?"

Sonic grinned, "Now let's not get carried away, Tails. We actually do want to get them home eventually..."

One More Chat Before We Leave

The two echidnas talked for a while. Knuckles told Gawain about his fights against storms. He told him of his exploration of the island and the various biomes that covered it. He told him of his own encounters with Eggman and their fights against him- though keeping certain details from the knight so as to not overwhelm him.

Gawain told Knuckles of growing up far away from his people's homeland, though he did not have many details on their initial voyage to the lands of Camelot and its surrounding kingdoms. He told him of his journey to knighthood, his encounters with dragons, how he'd met his fellow knights and how they formed King Arthur's group of most trusted knights. How he had watched the king's corruption and then Sonic's arrival and liberation of the kingdom from it, and how the kingdom was ultimately doomed to fall and was slowly doing so, but how the knights kept up their task of looking after the people. They still took the time to smell the flowers and enjoy their land, even if they knew that one day... It would fade away.

And Sonic listened to all of it.

He had witnessed much of Knuckles' story, and heard much of Gawain's tale when he was in the time of Camelot's slow decline. He found it funny to hear Gawain mention that the troublemakers he'd spent some time removing from power still believed him to be around, even now. Nobody had seen Camelot's king in some time, not in person, but he'd left such an impression as someone that was there one moment, gone the next, and then back again whenever needed, that nobody had yet dared to try and attack for fear he'd rise up from the mists like a mighty ghost.

Tails followed along behind, asking the occasional question and taking note. Indeed, much of the history of Camelot had been made into legend, and details muddled or twisted for the sake of entertainment, but the truth remained the same. The knights were noble, honorable, and loyal to their king... Even if their king was not always present.

By the time the trio and their blades finally decided they must return to Londoon, the two echidnas had spent hours sharing what they knew of their people's customs and culture, and Sonic felt like he'd done both of them a service. *Gawain* had gotten a chance to see and hear about just a sliver of his ancestral home, and *Knuckles* had gotten the chance to speak and confide in another of his own kind, even if it was

only for a few hours. Sonic had a feeling both of them would hold onto these moments for the rest of their lives.

"I want to hear more about your little excursion one of these days, Blue." Knuckles murmured as the hedgehog climbed onto the transport.

"One of these days." Sonic promised, and then waved to the echidna before closing the door. "Take us home, Tails! Or, you know... Back to the ground."

Tails chuckled, "You think the others had a nice morning while we were gone?"

"Without Eggman to beat up, Shadow's probably bored out of his mind..."

Shadow was by no means bored, he was too busy doing the same thing Knuckles and Gawain had been doing, except with Lancelot.

It was surprising to even him how easily he was able to open up to the knight, though just like Knuckles, he kept certain parts to himself. He didn't share the details of his mission for revenge and how he'd almost destroyed the planet in his grief, but he *did* share how he had grown up in an isolated ' *village',* how the invading army had chased him and his sister through the ' *streets* ' in pursuit, and how his sister had been slain helping him escape, if only for a short while.

He told him of how he had been placed under the same sleep spell that Lancelot had, and then been awakened by Eggman. He summarized his first few encounters with Sonic, and how the two had slowly come to an understanding, though they were still *not friends.* He told of his work with GUN alongside Rouge and Omega, who he simply described as one of Eggman's enchanted suits of armor that had gained a conscience, and of some of the events they'd witnessed since then.

Lancelot relayed his own tales in turn. He told of how his family had been slain as well, and as a young hoglet he was found by Nimue, who raised him.

He told of how he sought out Arthur and became one of his closest knights, and how he had felt his world crumble when he discovered his closest confidante had been nothing but a magical illusion. He told

Shadow of how Sonic had been the one to pick up the pieces and pull the knights back out of their slump, to guide their actions not to merely follow the king's orders, but to serve the people of Camelot.

He told Shadow of how he too had a rivalry, against Gawain, but how the wizard Merlina's words haunted the two, how she had stated that their rivalry would lead Camelot to ruin. Thus far, it had seemed that it was no more than a taunt to destabilize their resolve, but still, it lingered... Could such a thing really lead to the destruction of a kingdom? Could their actions really escalate to such a significant state?

Then, the knight got up, put on his armor, and offered a sparring lesson. Shadow agreed, and the pair stepped out of the Minkoff home and out onto the connected grounds. They left behind the house, moved past the graveyard, and out into the small patch of woods that grew behind it. A little bit of wilderness within the city. Lancelot held Arondight, and Shadow held Secace.

"Now, I am aware that swordplay is not entirely relied upon as much here as it is in my home, but I hope that I can at least give you a quick lesson before I depart."

Shadow gripped the hilt of the blade he'd been gifted by Nimue, overlooking it and trying to find a way that felt more natural to hold it. "You are certain you are up for this after yesterday's... *Events* ?" He asked.

Lancelot's brows furrowed, "My sight has nearly returned, and I am rested enough to engage in a little training. No wound is going to keep me from my task."

Shadow couldn't argue with that. "Alright then."

"Find your grip and stance. You want the blade to be an extension of your arm, not weighing you down. Traditionally in Camelot, you would also be wearing armor, as I am, so you would want to find the stance that offsets its weight as well."

Shadow shifted his stance and grip on Secace, but found unsurprisingly that the grip he needed was practically the same as Lancelot's. "Alright..."

"Concentrate on your strokes and swings, put force but focus into them."
Lancelot swung Arondight with a swift motion and a single leaf was

sliced from the tree branch above him. "Just like you do with your chaos abilities, you want to hit your mark. Hitting your opponent's armor won't do you much good if you were aiming for where they were exposed."

Shadow nodded, "I will not miss."

Lancelot smirked, and then pulled his mask down over his face. "We shall see, young knave...!"

When Sonic walked back into the Minkoff's home, he was met with Lancelot looking far better than he had been the day before. He was on his feet, once more donning his armor, and looking on beside Percival as Shadow was wrapping his arm with gauze. "What happened!?"

Lancelot looked to Arondight, "Shadow missed, and Arondight did *not* ."

The sword chirped in agreement.

Shadow was glaring, but not as angry as Sonic would've expected. "It was a lucky shot." He mumbled as he tightened the gauze with his teeth.

"And he refused help tending to his injury." Percival murmured.

"Of course he did." Sonic sighed.

"Were you successful?" Lancelot asked, "You were absent for some time."

"We were indeed."
Gawain pulled his blades from their hilts and they flew up to begin conversation with Arondight and Lavatein, filling the front room with a chorus of hums, chirps and sweet high notes. "We remained for a time to converse with the island's guardian. He, like myself, is an echidna, and it was a pleasant conversation to have with one of my own kind again."

"I am certain."

Shadow finally got his wound tended to, and then stood up once more. "So now what?"

"Now, we need to head to Nimue's Lake so she can send them home."

"And what about Caliburn? Is he going back too?"

Sonic blinked, he hadn't actually thought about that. But fortunately, the blade himself answered the question.

"Unlike the rest, I was not sent here before my time. I arrived through the trail of time and ages past. My place is with my wielder, and that is here and now."

Tails grinned, "Glad to have you with us, Caliburn. I'm sure we'll find something you can help us with."

Lancelot nodded solemnly, "Very well, then... We should be on our way, then. Camelot still needs our protection..."

Epilogue

The group of travelers didn't reach the edges of Deep Woods until dusk- delayed a bit more by Mandolin insisting she prepare them one last meal before they left for Camelot. "Allow me to grant you the gift of the Spice Trade one last time, my knights..."

That last meal had given Silver time to arrive, and he insisted on accompanying them to Nimue's Lake. He'd missed part of the adventure, and as a fellow time traveler himself, he wanted to see how it all ended.

Lancelot once more took the point into the dark, gloomy wood, but this time, the forest seemed less eerie somehow. The supernatural darkness still hung over it as it had before, but the atmosphere was still and quiet. No birds, no insects, just the soft pattering of their feet in the moss and brush on the forest floor.

The only light that they traveled by was that of Silver's power, a flickering blue glow that stretched out and split the shadows into strands as they passed the trees and bushes.

Shadow had thought of using his chaos for more light, but the trees remembered his burst from days prior and firmly put their roots down on the matter. Sonic had to put himself between snapping branches that were threatening to smack the Ultimate Lifeform on the head.

Tails held his tablet close to his chest as he looked around, "I'd love to come back and learn more about this place when we can..." he whispered with an awestruck smile.

"I would be happy to provide you some knowledge, Miles." Caliburn remarked, smiling back at the fox who seemed far more interested in the land's history than Sonic had when they first met. "Much to share..."

As they continued onward, Silver's glow was joined by others. Crystals and mushrooms along the path ignited into color, auras of blues, greens and purples joining the cyan. The black trunks of the trees glittered like stars were etched into their bark, and they all followed a trail formed by them through the darkness, around the looming roots of the Behemoth Tree, and then all the way to the edge of the lake's sunken ruins.

"The lake..." Percival hummed, "...You spoke of the water's fading, but-"

"It is quite the shock when you first see it." Sonic comforted, "Come on, the entrance is this way..."
He led them over to the crumbling pavilion, pushing the stone away to reveal the steps. "Watch your head, it's a tight space here at first."

They all climbed down into the dark, and Silver hovered alongside the steps. Down here, his powers ignited the walls further than before, and Sonic could see the cavern was even larger than the lake above it.

"Incredible..." Percival whispered, "...I hope Nimue was not harmed when it fell here."

Shadow huffed, "Hardly seemed hurt to *me* ..."

They reached the bottom and Sonic approached the water, but even when they were prepared, the sudden brightness of the water when he touched it made them all step back and look away to adjust.

You have returned, Knight of the Wind...

Sonic smiled, "I have... The quest is over, and I was hoping that you may be able to return them home, as you did so for me all those ages ago."

Of course... Your victory was sure, for I have memory of their tales of their time here...

"If you knew everything was going to be fine, why not tell us that *before* ?" Shadow complained.

And spoil the entertainment of watching your journey unfold...? I get such fun so infrequently.

Shadow glared, but Lancelot placed a hand to the other's shoulder, "Do not take it personally, the spirits can be that way at times..."

"The being who raised you *knew* you'd be harmed and didn't bother to warn you to avoid it?"

"Maybe... It was *inevitable* ." Silver grumbled under his breath, "As annoying as it is for me to *say* something like that. I like to think *all* tragedies can be avoided in some way or another."

"An optimistic thought..." Gawain whispered, but he didn't seem to

have that same sentiment. "...I suppose this will be our farewell."

"Yes, I suppose so."
Sonic turned to the three knights and their blades, giving a smile. "Even if our reunion was brief and full of peril, I am happy I got the chance to see you all again, and to hear that Camelot remains peaceful thus far."

"Indeed, it was quite the quest." Percival took Sonic's hands, squeezing them a little. "But we too enjoyed the moments we got to see of your world, and the allies you have here. It is a relief to know that you are not alone in your struggle here."

"No, I never *am* ." Sonic looked to Tails, to Silver, and to Shadow. Each of them gave nods or smiles in return, and then Sonic reached back and grasped Caliburn's hilt with one hand. "...And you helped bring one *more* friend back to me."

"I have no doubt that your quest of defending this realm will be greatly eased with your sacred sword once again at your side."

The boat appeared from the mists, bobbing up and down along the top of the water and shimmering with its own colors.

"Keep each other safe, won't you?" Sonic asked.

"You have our word as you did before, Arthur." Lancelot informed, and then gave a nod to Shadow. Something passed between the two of them, but Sonic didn't ask what. It wasn't his business what the two dark hedgehogs had with each other.

"And you blades keep one another safe, alright?"
The walls of the cave echoed with chirps, hums and high-pitched tones. "Good."

The knights waded their way into the water, each climbing aboard the wooden vessel and getting settled. Sonic stood at the edge of the lake, watching on as it floated out, the mists curling around it and slowly fading it out of view. Sonic could only imagine that this was how *they* had felt when *he* had traveled forward in time back to his own realm, watching the boat fade into the distance until finally... It was gone, and the lights of the lake faded to a duller, less vibrant light.

"Mission accomplished." Shadow murmured, gripping the hilt of Secace that remained strapped to his side. "...We should go, we have a long walk and then a long flight ahead of us."

"Never stop moving, huh?" Sonic teased.

"Shouldn't that be what we say to *you* , Sonic?" Silver joked right back, "Who knows? Maybe one of these days, we can all make a voyage to the past to see them again."

Sonic smiled wider, "Yeah... Maybe so... How long do you think before Eggman strikes again?"

"He'll definitely need a few days to pull together his assets." Shadow sighed, "We took down a lot of his bots the other day, but he'll be back with more... He always is."

"But next time, he'll have to deal with you and me using our blades to slice them to bits, huh?"

"Hmph. Just because I have a sword now doesn't mean I am going to *use* it. And aren't you worried Caliburn will get *blunted* using him that much?"

"Excuse me." Caliburn remarked, "I can hear you just fine. I am more than just a piece of metal, after all."

"You sure are, Cal... Best to head back. I'm gonna be so jet-lagged when I get back home..."

"Well..." Silver clasped his hands together, "...You all could stay at my place for the night? I've got a futon and a ton of blankets and stuff."

"That's really generous, Silver, but-"

"We'll take you up on the offer!" Tails announced, giving Sonic an elbow to the ribs. "Come on, Sonic. We've always been the ones hosting *him* before, let him return the favor, now that he's got a place of his own!"

Sonic gave his little brother a smile, and then an eye roll. "Oh alright, if you insist, Silver-"

"Yes yes yes! I've never had people stay at my house before! Gosh, just being able to say my house is so nice-"

"I'll have to dip out." Shadow remarked, pulling out the red chaos emerald from his quills. "I've got work to get back to. Chaos Control!"

The dark hedgehog vanished from the cave, and Sonic blinked. "...Did he have that emerald on him the entire time?"

"He's *Shadow* , Sonic." Tails replied with a shrug, "He always has one or is *looking* for one..."

The familiar *fwip!* of a chaos portal closing caught Rouge's attention, but she barely looked away from the tiny screen she was leaned over as the green flash that had lit up the room vanished into darkness once more. "Didn't stay for the after-party?"

"No."

"I assume they all got home safely?"

"They're in the hands of some mischievous spirit now..."
Shadow came to her right, sitting down by the desk. "What did you find?"

"You know how hard it is to sneak in and get DNA samples done in a lab and then print out the results without anyone noticing? And at 3 AM, no less! ...But here."
She turned the screen towards the hedgehog, "See for yourself."

Shadow pulled the tiny computer closer, his finger scrolling down lines of text and code in front of him. Rouge eyed the blade strapped to his side, an intricate scabbard hiding the blade itself. A souvenir of some kind? She decided not to bring it up just yet.

"...It's close."

"Very, very close, Shadow..." Rouge leaned a bit onto the desk, "...Like... Parent and child close."

Shadow's brows furrowed, "He's not my father, Rouge."

"He's the closest thing to one you got! Genetically, of course."

Shadow sighed, "...This is ridiculous. Why did I even ask you to do this for me? It doesn't even matter."

"Because I think deep down, you wanted that connection to be true... You wanted to know that somewhere out there, there was family that got their happy ending."

"Hmph. Doesn't he ultimately die as a monk after being rejected by the love of his life...?"

" *Sonic is King Arthur* , Shadow. That pretty much negates anything I

ever thought was true about the stories passed down in those old folktales. Lancelot could have lived a long, fulfilling life and died of old age, peacefully, in his sleep."

Shadow's ears tried to fold down a bit, but the hedgehog stood up and walked away from the desk. "I need time to think this over... Thanks for the help, Rouge."

"You're welcome... Don't forget to unhook that sword of yours before you go to bed. We don't need a mess."

"You worried I'd cut my leg off with it?"

"I was more worried about the mattress."

Shadow smiled just a hint, and then he warped back out of the room.

Rouge sighed, pulling the computer back to her and then closing it. "...I'll get that sword for my collection one of these days, I already know it's *expensive* ."

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